

# Performativity, Spectrality, Hysteria: the performance of masculinity in late 1990s British dance

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## **Abstract**

The thesis advances a reading of British contemporary dance pieces from the late 1990s which deal explicitly with the performance of masculinity and male homosexuality. It proposes that the dancing bodies engage in various ways with the constitutive losses that are compelled by the repetition of masculine norms. These losses are, however, not a permanent foundational lack but performative demands for the repeated disappearance or dematerialisation of certain bodies. Following Jacques Derrida, the investigation does not consider the ontology of masculinity but its 'hauntology': the series of spectres and hauntings which mark the choreography of gender but also threaten to exploit its inherent failures. To engage with these ghosts, Judith Butler's deconstructive theories of gender melancholia and abjection are considered together with a third psychoanalytical notion, hysteria, in order to address the disruptive reanimation of histories of loss in excessive performances.

Whilst the investigation focuses on how Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* (1995) invokes a fetishised 'masculine presence' which is nevertheless haunted by the effeminacy it attempts to exclude, it argues that Javier de Frutos's *Grass* (1997) and *The Hypochondriac Bird* (1998), and *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* (1998), choreographed by Lea Anderson, engage directly with abject figures and deadly desire. The analysis traces how de Frutos plays out a rerouting of the violence of subjection in hyperbolic displays of hysteria, illness and aggression. Anderson's choreography is investigated as an *unheimlich* series of fragmentary repeats, doubles, and reflections of both the images of the eponymous Austrian artist and the melancholic discourses of disavowed homosexual desire. The difficult necessity of exploring subversive performativity in performance is investigated, and the thesis argues that writing about dancing can address spectral figurations of gender identity whilst acknowledging its own haunted citationality.

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## Introduction

This thesis investigates the performance and performativity of masculinity and homosexuality in dance work by three British choreographers; Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* (1995), Javier de Frutos's *Grass* (1997) and *The Hypochondriac Bird* (1998), and Lea Anderson's *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* (1998). From the mid-1990s onwards in Britain there has been a burgeoning interest in dancing men, as 'masculinity', and its seemingly troubled relationship to dance, has been explicitly investigated across a variety of cultural fields. The popular UK films *The Full Monty* (1997), and *Billy Elliot* (2000), broke box office records and both explored, as central themes, the relationship between working class masculinity and dance performance (strip tease in *The Full Monty*, ballet in *Billy Elliot*). Much media coverage was dedicated to this increased exposure of dancing men and several popular television documentary series (such as *The Real Full Monty* on Channel 5 and *Ballet Boyz* on BBC2) followed in the wake of these films. These television series have suggested that there has been an increasing number of boys and men becoming involved in dance performance as a direct result of the new acceptability of dancing men.

In chapter three of this thesis I consider how Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*, for his company Adventures in Motion Pictures (AMP), was positioned by the media, and by Bourne himself, as a key work in this shift of opinions concerning dancing men both in film – *Billy Elliot* concludes with a scene from Bourne's *Swan Lake* – and the theatre – *Swan Lake* broke West-End box office records and, at the time of writing, still continues to tour. The increased reputation and affluence of AMP is shared, (although to a lesser degree) by the other companies I examine. Javier de Frutos, whose excessive and abject work I explore in chapter four, has won several awards, was the subject of a *South Bank Show* television documentary, and has received an Arts Council Fellowship and numerous commissions from international

companies. Ramsay Burt (1995: 168) has noted that Lea Anderson's all-male company, The Featherstonehaughs, whose work I examine in chapter five, receive four-times more bookings than the sister company, The Cholmondeleys. The work of both companies, which has foregrounded the representation of gender, has been televised, garnered many awards (including even an MBE for Anderson) and been required viewing for GCSE and A-level students. Several other prominent British choreographers, notably Lloyd Newson and his company DV8 and Michael Clark, have also received both financial success and critical acclaim for their choreographic investigations of masculinity and homosexuality. In commercial and critical terms therefore, it seems that dancing men are a success story, although, as I will argue in the case of *Swan Lake*, this success often comes at a cost.

In academia, as in popular culture and the contemporary dance world, dancing men received increasing attention throughout the 1990s. This was part of a cross-discipline interest in masculinity beginning in the late 1980s as many of the concerns and questions articulated in feminist theory were directed specifically at the construction of masculinity<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, an early draft of chapter three was presented at the conference 'Posting the Male: Representations of Masculinity in the Twentieth Century' at Liverpool John Moores University in August 2000, which drew together contributions, over three days, from a diverse range of academic fields, attesting to both the breadth of current research into masculinity and its recognition within universities as a locus for international scholarly interrogation. In dance studies, Ramsay Burt's book *The Male Dancer* (1995) was the first major theoretical study of men performing in ballet, modern and postmodern dance, and his groundbreaking work informs much of my enquiry. As Burt acknowledges, a feminist examination of dancing women in academic writing predates and informs his work; Christy Adair's *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (1992), for example, explores many of the arguments articulated by practitioners and writers since the 1970s and its analysis is situated in a tradition that dates back to the beginnings of Modern Dance. Sally Banes's *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on*



*Stage* (1998) also puts forward the argument that Western dance in the last century has been explicitly occupied with 'feminist' concerns, in all their variety. The "feminized field" (Banes 1998: 215) of contemporary dance has not excluded men but their performance of gender has been rendered suspect in a way that women dancing 'femininity' has not; male dancing is linked to homosexuality. Burt has argued that historically there has been a characterisation of dance as a 'feminine' pursuit which meant that men were rendered suspicious through their pursuit of a 'feminine' genre of performance. Burt also suggests that a link was forged between ballet and gay metropolitan identities in the early twentieth century which was both exploited and disavowed by figures such as Diaghilev and Nijinsky. Susan Manning makes a similar case for American modern dance and she suggests that a complex dynamic of 'coded messages' marks the work of Ted Shawn, Merce Cunningham and Alvin Ailey who "both reiterated and undermined the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality that had constructed the closet in the first place" (Manning 1998: 34). As Manning notes, Marcia Siegel's particular history of American dance in *The Shapes of Change* (1979) suggests that "the specter of homosexuality – or at least societal inadequacy – haunted generations of American male dancers and still exerts its influence" (Siegel 1979: 305). Although Siegel is keen to exorcise this particular ghost it is precisely this continuous haunting of dancing men by homosexuality, and its conflation with 'societal inadequacy' that interests me in this thesis. The spectre of male homosexuality looms large over the following chapters, not simply as a historical figure however but as a disruption of the contemporary construction of 'masculine' bodies.

If masculinity and dancing have become foregrounded in recent years then the centrality of questions of sexuality in this discursive growth has mirrored the focus on gender and sexuality in the expanding field of queer theory. Inaugurated in 1990 with the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, queer theory set in motion the notion of gender performativity, which, as I discuss in detail in chapter one, has

subsequently been taken up by several writers to explore the presentation of gender in performance. Jane Desmond's introduction to *Dancing Desires* (2001), an anthology of scholarship dealing with sexuality and choreography, argues that the late 1990s witnessed the beginnings of a cross pollination of dance studies and queer theory as both historians and theorists began to examine the gaps in dance analysis. Indeed Desmond suggests that the discipline of dance studies per se should be regarded as intrinsically involved in questions of gender and sexuality because it focuses on the movements and stylisations of the body: it is "a response to, or negotiation of, the injunctions against same-sex desire and the conflation of theatrical dancing with 'the feminine'" (Desmond 2001: 4). Desmond offers a useful survey of the literature which makes explicit this link between dancing bodies and discourses of gender and sexuality, and she foregrounds those writers who refocus attention on the gay or lesbian choreographers within the western theatre dance canon, and who critique the heterosexual idealism of ballet and modern dance. There is, as she titles her essay, a recent attention to "making the invisible visible" in writing about the 'hidden' sexualities of, for example, Shawn or Cunningham, or to analysing and recording social dance practices in gay bars or lesbian dance clubs.

The increased visibility, in both cultural and critical fields, of non-heteronormative desires does not, however, necessarily indicate increased political power, nor is 'sexuality' equally visible across gender. Lesbianism is the focus of only two of the essays in *Dancing Desires*, while there are eleven essays which centre on male homosexuality. Whilst this is indicative of an increasing amount of scholarship which centres on masculinity and dance, what seems apparent, and what I take up and explore throughout this thesis, is that the issue of homosexuality is specifically raised when writing about men and dancing. Whereas Adair and Banes in their explorations of dancing women only mention lesbianism as a biographical note (in relation to Loie Fuller), Burt's study of the history of dancing men explores male homosexuality in some detail as a theoretical issue. Judith Lynne Hanna's book



*Dance, Sex and Gender* (1988), dedicates a chapter to the discussion of sexuality but she uncritically and problematically divides this between the implicit heterosexuality of women and the explicit homosexuality of male dancers. As Petra Kuppers has argued, there is little discussion of lesbianism within dance studies partly because there is no clear codified way for lesbian choreography to appear. As a result “lesbian dance performance has to come to terms with the cultural invisibility of the lesbian body” (Kuppers 1998: 47), whereas, I propose, male dancing has to come to terms with the spectacular excess of the gay body. This excess of ‘visible’ sexuality is linked to gender performance in a particular way; ‘effeminacy’, as a particular stylisation of bodily movement, is read as both the signification of homosexuality and simultaneously as a ‘failure’ of masculinity.

The centrality of ‘visible’ sexual identity in the analysis of men dancing therefore raises some key points that will be elaborated throughout the thesis. The ‘femininity’ of dancing would suggest that a woman who dances is not necessarily challenging ‘her’ gender in the same way that a male dancer does and she therefore does not challenge her implied heterosexuality. As Burt, Desmond, and many others have argued, the spectacle of dance in contemporary Western culture is always already coded as ‘feminine’; when a man occupies this site therefore, ‘masculinity’ is troubled. Because contemporary gender norms are produced through compulsory heterosexuality the disruption of ‘masculinity’ through dance evokes the spectre of homosexuality. The male dancer therefore risks the excessive spectre/spectacle of homosexuality precisely because ‘masculinity’ (as a heterosexual construct) is troubled in dance performance. I will explore the complex conflation of homosexuality with a lack of masculinity in detail when discussing Bourne’s choreography of ‘masculine’ Swans and de Frutos’s performance of vicious, effeminate and camp identities. Attesting to the pervasive figuration of male homosexuality as effeminate spectacle, both *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot* have incidental gay characters which arguably address the generalised

visibility of homosexuality raised by the display of dancing male bodies but contain the spectre in a body away from the main heterosexual, 'masculine' protagonist.

In my investigation of notions of visibility, spectrality and 'masculinity' I will engage with several articles from Desmond's anthology, all of which cite a notion of masculinity as "performative". Unsurprisingly therefore, given that Judith Butler first proposed the notion of gender performativity, her name has forty-six citations in the index and Desmond expounds the importance of Butlerian concepts of reiteration in her introduction (Desmond 2001: 12). Rather than simply appropriate the notion of the 'performative' into an analysis of performance, however, I explore in chapter one the complicated interrelationship of 'expression' and repetition in these concepts. Drawing on Butler, together with J.L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, I investigate the development of the concept of performativity and the characterisation of performance as a theatricalisation of the repetition inherent in performative acts.

Performance in Butler also however conceals the citations which constitute it and I consider theories of repetition in performance from Peggy Phelan, Heidi Gilpin, Susan Leigh Foster and Geraldine Harris in order to examine further the series of displacements, concealments, and disavowals in the act of performance. I posit a conjunction between a Derridean concept of writing, as marks which exceed the intention of the author and are repeated without 'expressing' an origin, and Foster's notion of performative choreography which repeats cultural norms of bodies and gender. Rather than focus on the radical disappearance of the body in performance, as Phelan has posited in her 'ontology' of performance, I inquire after the compulsory appearances and disappearances invoked by the repetition of the marks of gendered normativity. Performance is neither an original, subversive moment nor a slavish repetition of norms but a ghostly movement between the two; "Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. . . Let us call it a *hauntology*" (Derrida 1994: 10). I suggest that a



hauntological analysis of performativity in performance can acknowledge both the history of the citational chains which constitute gender and the potential break with this history in order to rework masculinity, opening up to future choreographies of homosexuality which would not reduce it to an expressive identity position, nor the failure of masculinity, but a provisional deployment of the stylised body.

In chapter two I turn to explore further Butler's notion of performativity and its challenging engagement of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts of identification and desire. The normative gendered body does not simply 'express' its identity – it performs the loss of certain attachments, and indeed the 'masculine' body is performed through the disavowal of desire for other bodies. Butler reads Freud's theories on melancholic incorporation – the identification with a lost object as a refusal to acknowledge its loss – to suggest that gender is formed through the melancholic incorporation of homosexual attachments. Richard Dyer (1993) has explored the pervasive stereotype of the melancholic homosexual – the “sad young man” which appears across many different media (Dyer mentions a dance piece by Rudi van Dantzig titled *Monument for a Dead Boy*<sup>2</sup>) – and Jonathon Dollimore (1998) has investigated the many overlaps and confluences between homoeroticism and death throughout western culture. Butler's concern is however to examine the melancholic incorporation of homosexuality at the heart of normative identity, rather than a specifically gay melancholia, and she argues that gender positions can be 'assumed' only upon the condition of the loss, and the disavowal of the loss, of homosexuality.

Butler suggests that 'the body' is defined and delineated as a consequence of this foreclosure; the “loss is denied and incorporated, and the genealogy of that transmutation fully forgotten and repressed. The sexed surface of the body thus emerges as the necessary sign of a natural(ized) identity and desire” (Butler 1990b: 71). The boundaries of the naturalised body are maintained through the processes of abjection, which Butler traces through the work of Mary Douglas and

Julia Kristeva. Abjection does not simply regulate the breach of the inside/outside binary through matter such as blood, spit, faeces and semen but also creates figures which constitute psychic sites of refused identification – Butler suggest the “feminized fag” is such a figure (1993: 103). Both melancholia and abjection are therefore identificatory processes which produce masculinity as the result of a ‘rejection’ of homosexuality which is, in fact, an incorporation of this rejected figure.

In addition to an exploration of melancholia and abjection, I propose a third psychoanalytical process – that of hysteria – in order to consider how losses can be played out in choreographic work. I draw on the work of various feminist scholars who posit hysteria as a ‘feminine’ disruption of heterosexual normativity, through the excessively expressive body which stages other bodies and, in its repetitive stylisation of surface enactments, refuses to yield a ‘depth’. I will explore whether ‘hysteria’, when played out on male bodies, can unsettle the naturalisation of this maleness through a spectral encounter with feminine identification and homosexuality. Repeating, unfaithfully, the pathologisation of gay desire, this deployment of hysterical choreography hyperbolically acts out the losses inherent in conventional masculinity and potentially refigures the abject body as a site for pleasure, identification and resistance.

In the subsequent chapters I examine in detail specific examples of recent choreographic practice which, I argue, all deal with melancholic masculinity and homosexuality. I explore how Bourne, De Frutos, and Anderson employ hysteria in their choreography, but I examine the various ways in which the discursive spectres of excessive homosexuality are made manifest or, indeed, choreographically dematerialised. I therefore consider the various figurations of spectrality in these pieces, the movements between ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ which condition both the performative moment of dance and the recitation of masculinity. The “repetition *and* first time” (Derrida 1994: 10) of the specter, and of performativity, is made explicit in these works since they deal with the



reconstruction, restaging, reworking and reanimation of other bodies. The archetypal romantic ballet *Swan Lake* reappears in both Bourne's piece of the same name and de Frutos's *The Hypochondriac Bird*; Anderson's choreography is constructed from Egon Schiele's portraits; both Anderson and de Frutos reference their own work in their self-reflexive staging of masculinity. The loss of other bodies in the performance of 'masculinity' is a major thematic device in Bourne's narrative of unrequited desire, in de Frutos's detailing of violent abandonment, and in Anderson's blank pastiche of Schiele's tormented imagery.

In chapter three I explore how connotations of homosexuality - effeminacy and hysterical excess - are disavowed in both the choreography and the critical reception of AMP's *Swan Lake*. The two protagonists of this highly narrative depiction of a doomed man are Scott Ambler as the Prince and Adam Cooper as the Swan but their duets together are read by Bourne and dance critics alike as based in identification rather than desire. Many reviews and interviews with Bourne and Cooper, attest to an absence of homosexuality but I suggest that these should be read as performative attempts to exorcise the visible excess of homosexuality and the failure of 'masculinity' that it comes to represent. I question to what extent a fetishistic presentation of the character of the Swan as a paragon of masculinity is an attempt to disavow a compulsory loss of homosexuality in the very masculinity he embodies. The Swan, choreographically, has a "very masculine presence" (Bourne 1996: 8) in order to deny any connection with the ballerina who usually takes the role of the Swan Queen, Odette. I explore how the ballerina, who is kept at bay by the figure of the Swan, is troubling because she has to be both absent, so that the Swan is not identified with her but present in order to signify sexual difference. I therefore inquire how the piece attempts to preserve a heterosexual notion of gender through the spectral femininity of the ballerina and the oppositional 'masculine presence' of the swans, despite the fact that the main duets of the piece, between the Prince and the Swan, are male-male and the course of the narrative is, arguably, homosexual. Homosexuality is,

however, produced as a disruptive spectre which hovers at the boundaries of Bourne's *Swan Lake* and I will discuss how the promotion and reception of this piece strive to separate identification and desire in order to prevent a reading of the central relationship as erotic.

This spectral absence/presence of homosexuality is further complicated by the commodification of the Swan – the male bodies are eroticised in all the publicity material and Bourne suggests that he cast Cooper, a principal from The Royal Ballet, because of the symbolic and capital value of ballet stars over and above that of contemporary dancers. I investigate whether Bourne's unwillingness to critique the fetishisation of masculinity repeats the melancholic reification of heterosexuality which lends his narrative its tragic trajectory – the Prince can never be the Swan and can never acknowledge that he wants him. Bourne's *Swan Lake* shows a Prince falling into hysterical madness and, finally, suicide because of the unliveability of his desire. Whilst, as a major cultural product with widespread success, this piece might go some way to reworking the cultural prohibitions on homosexuality that it describes, I discuss whether the pervasive fetishism of the choreography preserves these very prohibitions in place as a necessary feature of a 'very masculine presence'.

In chapter four I examine the performance of hysterical excess and compulsive abandonment in Javier de Frutos's pieces *Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird*. Whereas *Swan Lake* tells a linear narrative, both these pieces deal with repetitive choreography and linked scenes which detail homosexual seduction and pleasure but also the collapse of relationships and violent self-destruction. Unlike Bourne, de Frutos does not deal with a fetishised 'masculine presence' but a camp, theatrical, melodramatic characterisation. I discuss de Frutos's use of blood, nudity and sex in terms of an abject disruption of the coherence of a male body and his occupation of the abject sites of the effeminate, exotic other. De Frutos's deployment of a melodramatic style establishes his hysterical abjection as



inherently theatrical but I question whether this renders his work as less political than those performers (Franko B and Ron Athey for example) who use 'real' blood, sex and violence in their work. This opposition between 'real' and 'theatrical' is at the heart of the discussions of 'performance' and 'performativity' which I explore in chapter one of the thesis: in chapter three I investigate whether de Frutos's choreography can potentially reveal the repetitive citations which constitute performative identity within a highly stylised theatrical performance. Although de Frutos's work is often read as 'authentic' or autobiographical, I discuss whether the formalism of his choreographic structures, juxtaposed with the seemingly compulsive attachment to repeating trauma, offers a resignification of the expressive body which does not reveal its inner truth but exposes how this 'truth' is produced and regulated by threats of violence and desubjectivication.

Chapter five investigates the complex series of citations and surface enactments in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*. I explore how Lea Anderson collages together the Expressionist portraits by Egon Schiele on the bodies of the Featherstonehaughs and I examine how this restaging of 'expression' marks it as a surface effect rather than an internal essence. Both the notion of the artist and the choreographer are rendered through absence, in a performative 'sketching' of subjectivity which quotes, refers and marks but does not express a melancholic masculinity. These choreographic surfaces are multiplied because the piece thematises reflection: bodies are doubled across mirror images in order to create doppelgänger duets of divided selves. The audience's gaze is also reflected back towards itself through the blank address of the dancers and through Anderson's explicit staging of the desiring eye. Unlike either Bourne or de Frutos however, Anderson does not tell a story but instead stages a series of non-narrative sections which delineate the abject, erotic and deathlike figures who populate Schiele's paintings and drawings. I employ Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* (or uncanny) to explore the series of returns and repeats caused by the reflections – the expressive, hysterical imagery of Schiele's work is rendered more



ambiguous, unsettling and disruptive through Anderson's attention to replication and citation rather than biography and narrative. Although Freud suggests that the *unheimlich* is the return of the repressed, I question a notion that Schiele, and, by extension, Anderson, are exploring sexual repression or advocating liberation. The figures which return in the dance piece are the spectral remains of heterosexual masculinity – they are the fragmented, hysterical bodies whose repeated absence constitutes masculine ideality. Therefore what returns is the production of 'sex' itself and I propose that the 'repressed' *unheimlich* figures recite the foreclosure of homosexuality as already dead, they reanimate those bodies which splinter and decay 'outside' the coherent, smooth surface of masculinity. Whilst I enquire whether Bourne's choreographic fetishism preserves ideals, I ask whether Anderson's radical deployment of abjection through the Featherstonehaughs resignifies idealised 'masculinity' and cites historical bodies to open gender up to future performances of who and what can figure as masculine.

Finally, in my conclusion, I draw together the analysis of the dance performances to ask how notions of performativity, gender and subjectivity are circulated and shifted in choreographic iterations of spectrality and hysteria. None of the works under discussion offer a pure subversion of normative masculine but, on the other hand, nor does the repetition of homosexuality as sickly, abject and pathological in all these pieces signal the inevitability of the melancholic foreclosure of male homosexual desire. If dancing male bodies have to come to terms with the spectacle and the spectre of homosexuality then writing about performative masculinity also needs to evoke these ghostly figurations. I enquire how the complex ambivalence of these performances of masculinity foregrounds the spectral nature of both performative identity and dancing and how they can challenge the audience, including the writer, to open to uncertain refigurations of identity. If there is no solid ground, no final manifestation but series of hauntings and vanishings, then I question to what extent the task of the theorist is to make visible the constitutive absences of masculinity and how this can be achieved



without exorcising the disruptive potential of hysterical excess and spectral citations. I argue that theories of performativity can be used to engage with dancing male bodies and the problematics of homosexuality, but also contest and resignify the boundaries of gender performance and 'expressive' enactment in order to trouble the histories of both 'maleness' and 'dance' with hauntological and hysterical writings.

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<sup>1</sup> Some anthologies of the key texts in this area include *Men In Feminism*, (Jardine & Smith 1987), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, (Chapman & Rutherford 1988) and *Constructing Masculinity* (Berger, Wallis & Watson 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Dyer cites Graham Jackson, (1978), *Dance as Dance*, Ontario: Catalyst.

## **1. Performativity and Hauntology**

You are more than entitled not to know what the word 'performative' means.  
It is a new word and an ugly word, and perhaps it does not mean very much.  
But at any rate there is one thing in its favour, it is not a profound word.  
(Austin 1970: 233)

Whether or not it is a profound word, the 'performative' has had a profound effect on theories of performance and subjectivity and, ugly or not, the meanings of this new word have been much contested since J.L. Austin himself coined it. This chapter examines in detail the theory of performatives, with particular reference to Judith Butler's adoption of performativity to theorise gender performance. I will outline the development of the philosophical-linguistic idea of the performative speech act, first proposed by J. L. Austin, through a consideration of the critiques and developments of this theory, and its relationship to the more theatrical sense of 'performance'. When one examines performativity in the work of Butler and Jacques Derrida, and in commentaries on their work, a particular tension appears between 'performance' and 'performativity' which places intentionality or expression against reiteration or repetition.

The use of theories of performativity to investigate dance performance presents a challenge to notions that dance, as a non-verbal bodily art is 'expressive' of both the 'body' and its inner state, as I will explore in later chapters through the analysis of choreographic works. The history of early twentieth century dance could be said to be based in a turn to expression to counter the stale rigidity of ballet – this was how Isadora Duncan suggested the 'Dancer of the Future' should develop (in her essay written in 1902 and published posthumously). Mary Wigman in Germany was also a particularly articulate advocate for expression in choreography. In 1933 she wrote 'The Philosophy of Modern Dance' in which she argued "It is absolutely



necessary then that the dancer portray the dance in a way that will convey the meaning and force of the inner experiences which have inspired him to conceive this dance ... the expression without the inner experience in the dance is valueless” (Huxley & Witts 2002: 404). Four years later, on the other side of the Atlantic, Martha Graham was similarly espousing a notion that dance was concerned with the representation of internal emotional and psychological states: “The reality of the dance is its truth to our inner life. Therein its power to move and communicate experience” (Brown et al. 1998: 52-53). These sentiments from the early decades of the century may seem old-fashioned and irrelevant when considering the work of British choreographers in the 1990s but, I suggest, the notion of dance performance as expressive dominated much of twentieth-century choreography from Duncan onwards and still echoes in work that has been characterised as postmodern dance theatre.

Lea Anderson, Matthew Bourne and Javier de Frutos are members of a generation who began making dance work in Britain in the 1980s when both Wigman and Graham’s notions of a stylised ‘expressive’ dance language and codified psychological and emotional content were rejected in favour of a more Cunningham-esque lyrical abstract formalism, for example in the work of Richard Alston and Siobhan Davies, and this had by then become the new orthodoxy. Noël Carrol (1984), Debra Jowitt (1984) and Sally Banes (1987) have argued that American postmodern dance returned to ‘expression’ in the mid-eighties but did so critically in order to “resist definite interpretation” (Banes 1987: xxxvi), and a similar case could be made for British New Dance. Nevertheless, as I will examine in subsequent chapters, the pieces under discussion have still been judged by critics in terms of their ‘truth’ in reporting an inner state (Bourne and de Frutos) or their refusal to expose this interiority (Anderson). Dance as a form of expressive communication, which translates inside into outside still haunts the production and reception of these works. However I will argue that expression returns in the pieces under discussion here, made in 1995 (*Swan Lake*), 1997 (*Grass*) and 1998



(*The Hypochondriac Bird* and *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*), but with particular effects that do not allow a return to the notions of 'inner truth' expounded by the early Modern choreographers. Bourne's narrative work is perhaps the closest to notions of 'internal experience' and universal emotions articulated by the Modern choreographers, but it is useful to consider the staging of the various 'inner landscapes', both psychological and emotional, by Bourne in order to reveal the choreography of impossible male homosexuality in *Swan Lake*. Both de Frutos and Anderson on the other hand explicitly explore emotional expression as a means of deconstructing masculine identity and the constitutive exclusion of homosexuality. I will demonstrate that rather than reject 'expression' these choreographers place this notion in quotation marks and render it either hyperbolic or uncanny. In this chapter I therefore turn to explore the convolutions of 'performative' theory, in various incarnations, which offers ways of thinking through expression as a production, rather than a communication, of 'inner experience'.

### 1.1 Expression and Performativity

The term 'performative' is introduced in *How to do things with Words*, a collection of lectures originally delivered in 1955 by the English philosopher J. L. Austin. Austin suggests that it "is derived, of course, from 'perform', the usual verb with the noun 'action'" (Austin 1976: 6) and that he has coined it to describe a particular kind of spoken utterance which is, itself, the performing of an action, a 'speech act'. Austin initially divides all speech acts into constatives and performatives; a constative is a statement that describes or refers to a prior or external action or reality whereas a performative on the other hand enacts as it is spoken. Austin establishes two primary conditions for performative utterances;



- A. they do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false'; and
- B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something. (1976: 5, emphasis in original)

Austin rejects the notion of 'true' and 'false' when considering performatives - since they do not refer to an outside set of actions or reality, they cannot be judged upon their accuracy in depicting or describing it – and instead suggests that they are either happy/felicitous or unhappy/infelicitous. The success of a performative lies not in the presumed accuracy of its relationship to a referent but, for Austin, to the context of its utterance. Thus the example he gives of the wedding ceremony requires the authority of the priest, and the witness of the other participants in the ritual, in order for the performative "I do" to be felicitous. If the performative is separated from its context then it misfires. Austin claims however that even if "I do" is uttered in the wrong context then some action will have taken place, something will have happened even if it is not the action of marriage.

Austin also suggests that although the performative "I promise", needs the intention of the speaker to carry out that promise, the performative does not describe this intention – we can have 'false' or 'broken' promises which are still performative and which act in ways that exceed the consciousness of the speaker and which cannot circumscribe in advance the felicity of the utterance. Therefore, Austin argues, unhappiness is necessarily a risk of all performatives, and he extends the notion to include non-verbal acts – "infelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all *conventional* acts" (1976: 18-19, emphasis in original). Although performatives require a convention, or ritual context, it seems in this sentence that it is precisely this convention which marks them out for infelicity – a point which Austin does not explore but which is taken up by both Derrida and Butler in different ways. Austin categorises many different



types of infelicities, misfires, misinvocations, and abuses and indeed creates classifications of performatives as explicit and implicit, with 'half-pure' utterances between them, but what is important for this discussion is his rejection of 'expression'. Austin uses the word 'expression' in the sense of a commonplace phrase but also notes that the term 'expressing' is an "odious word" (1976: 75). He suggests that although many performatives seem to 'express' the internal state of the speaker to an audience, he questions whether that is necessarily a property of the performative itself or of the social convention;

There are numerous cases in human life where the feeling of a certain 'emotion' (save the word!) or 'wish' or the adoption of an attitude is conventionally considered an appropriate or fitting response or reaction to a certain state of affairs, including the performance by someone of a certain act, cases where such a response is natural (or we should like to think so!) In such cases it is, of course, possible and usual actually to feel the emotions or wish in question; and since our emotions or wishes are not readily detectable by others, it is common to wish to inform others that we have them. Understandably, though for slightly different and perhaps less estimable reasons in different cases, it becomes *de rigeur* to 'express' these feelings if we have them, and further even to express them when they are felt fitting, regardless of whether we feel anything at all which we are reporting. (Austin 1976: 78-79)

Performatives which purport to 'express' a feeling (classified by Austin as 'behabitives') cannot therefore guarantee this expression, and indeed it becomes unclear whether the context or convention provides the opportunity for the reporting of the internal state of the subject or in fact it demands these 'expressions' and thereby creates the interiority of the subject. 'Expression' becomes therefore a troubling performative which cannot fully deliver the intention or the self-presence of the subject 'expressing'; the convention or the ritual



requires that the expression 'fits' the context and indeed it attempts to prescribe in advance what 'expressions' are admissible and which will receive social ratification. 'Expressing' is perhaps such an odious word for Austin precisely because it suggests a seamless felicity between emotion and communication but also because it confuses the performative with the constative, in that 'expressing' both enacts the emotion it names and also presumably reports or represents a prior emotional state.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990b) Judith Butler similarly deploys performativity as a corrective to an expressive reading of signification but, unlike Austin, her attention is on gendered bodies and performances. At the end of the chapter 'Subversive Bodily Acts' in the section entitled 'Bodily Inscription, Performative Subversions' (p128 – 141) Butler considers the Cartesian and Christian notions, which, she argues, echo into structuralism and phenomenology, that 'the body' is a prediscursive, material substance awaiting animation by a figure external to it – a soul, a mind or a cultural discourse – which becomes internalised to form an identity. Out of this mind/body dualism a subject emerges who will be bound by the raw material of their body and use it to both experience the world and express their true nature through. Butler's concern is to question how the body becomes figured in this way, and suggests that the notion of 'internalisation' needs to be investigated as to how it produces the very interiority it professes to explain. Butler explores the work of Mary Douglas concerning taboos which inscribe the boundaries of the body and Kristeva's reading of this in terms of abjection (which I will consider in the next chapter) and then moves to consider a critique of an interior identity or substantial core as a figuring of substance upon the surface of the body, asking;

From what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? In what language is "inner space" figured? What kind of figuration is it, and



through what figure of the body is it signified? How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth? (Butler 1990b: 134)

Butler's answer begins with a consideration of Michel Foucault's challenge to mind/body dualisms in his oft-quoted assertion that "the soul is the prison of the body" (1991: 30) which Butler interprets as "the soul is a surface signification that contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction itself, a figure of interior psychic space inscribed on the body as a social signification that perpetually renounces itself as such" (Butler 1990b: 135). This renunciation of the 'surface signification' of interior identity is performed by discourses of expression which form a causal link between an interior psychic space and the external appearance of an identity, reading this signification as evidence of the invisible presence of an inner source. The forms this expressive identity adopts may be socially and historically produced and temporally inconsistent but both the interior space, and the material body, which becomes synonymous with this space (in the prison of the soul), endure as 'facts' or 'truths' upon which the various social dramas of identity are played out. Thus in theories of gender construction there are female and male sexes which are expressed through various constructions of femininity and masculinity. Butler argues however that this surface appearance is 'performative' in that it enacts what it claims only to express;

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface of the body*, through the play of signifying absences that suggest but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the



various acts which constitute its reality. (Butler 1990b: 136, emphasis in original)

Butler does not engage directly with Austinian theories of 'performativity' nor cite him in the text of *Gender Trouble* but, like Austin, she suggests that the 'performative' troubles 'expression' and, likewise, it deconstructs the concept that gender should be considered as a true or false report of the referent of 'sex'.

If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (Butler 1990b: 141)

She argues that an expressive model of gender identity not only posits the regulatory fiction of the communication of internal essences but does so in order to shore up the truth of 'sex' against the vagaries of a vacillating 'gender'. If 'gender' is only the social expression of a pre-social 'sex' then any attempt to challenge current norms of femininity or masculinity will inevitably meet their limit in these essences, which, as pre-social, pre-discursive 'facts' of a body are not available for change. According to the expressive model although what it means socially at any given time to be 'a man' may change, men will always be men by the very fact of their maleness (which will not change) and any attempt to redefine the role of women will be limited by the restrictions of being female (which is figured as more limiting than being male). Not only does this close down any investigation of 'sex',

and doom feminist projects to failure, but it serves to restrict the terms of identity to a heterosexual binary;

In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. If the “cause” of desire, gesture, and act can be localized within the “self” of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practises which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view. The displacement of a political and discursive origin of gender identity onto a psychological “core” precludes an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about the ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity. (Butler 1990b: 136)

If the dominant forms of gender are performed so as to establish an interior truth as their substantial ground, which will be figured but never seen, and do so in such a way as to foreclose this ground from enquiry and disavow the performative constituency of the inner/outer binary then, Butler asks, are there ways in which gender can be performed which do the opposite;

What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire? (Butler 1990b: 139)



Butler's own suggestion is drag performance which "fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler 1990b: 137). Reading against the notion of drag as a bad copy of heterosexual authenticity, Butler argues that the imitation made explicit in drag reveals (or has the potential to reveal) "*the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency,*" (ibid. emphasis in original). Drag is read as a form of parody which not only mocks gender normativity but also denies its claim to originality – "As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself" (Butler 1990b: 138). Performance, it seems, can therefore reveal the performativity of gender and enact a subversion of the standards of 'normality,' 'heterosexuality' and 'authenticity' by which an 'expression' of gender is judged – by showing gender to be constructed through the repetitious practice of mimicry drag seems to offer the potential for political change.

## 1.2 Writing and the performing parasite

This final section of *Gender Trouble*, with its elaboration of radical drag, which I have drawn upon here, became popular in the early '90's and was taken up as a call to perform multiple permutations of gender as a strategy of liberation.<sup>1</sup> Butler's notion of gender as a performative does not however mean that any performance of gender is possible. Gender is the recitation of norms which are both limiting and enabling and form the double-bind of subjectivity – the subjection to power and the agency gained thereby– which becomes a main focus of Butler's writings after *Gender Trouble* partly in response to a reading which mistook gender as a volitional taking up of a style. In an interview for *Radical Philosophy*, Butler suggests that the popularity of the notion of performativity as drag far surpassed her intention – "I offered it as an example of performativity, but it has been taken up as the paradigm for performativity" (Osborne & Segal 1994: 33). She notes that a

“desire for a radical theatrical remaking of the body is obviously out there in the public sphere” but suggests that it is “a terrible misrepresentation of what I wanted to say!” (ibid.). Butler is wary of this reading of ‘performativity’ as equalling radical drag because her intention is to show that all gender is performative (not just queer identities) and that the repetition of gender norms is a necessary and painful condition of subjectivity not a volitional act by an already formed subject. The question which remains for Butler then is not how to make gender performative, since it is always already repeating and reciting gender norms, but how to do this unfaithfully – how to render explicit the imitative nature of gender.

The example of disruptive performance as ‘subversive drag’ given by Butler in *Gender Trouble* therefore becomes ‘ambivalent drag’ (1993: 137) in *Bodies That Matter* when discussing Jennie Livingston’s documentary film *Paris is Burning* and it is useful to consider the qualifications that are made. Butler argues against the notion that an operational distance between performer and performance is the space of performativity; although the walkers at the Harlem drag balls choose to perform and put on their masquerade, Butler contends that an ambivalence arises because they are repeating homophobic, misogynistic and racist discourses which are precisely the discourses which have interpellated them as lower class black and Latino queers. Their masquerade is not an ironic playing out of high class feminine roles in order to denigrate them or territorialise the feminine, as Peggy Phelan (1993) suggests, nor is it simply an aspirational negation of their racial, class or sexual difference to become privileged white women, as bell hooks (1991) has argued (this would cover only a section of the many different categories at the ball anyway). Rather it is a strategic repetition of the often painful recitations which constitute their subjection. This makes the notion of subversion more difficult in that there is no way to predict how this repetition will be taken up, whether it will be read as merely evidence of their abject status or as an empowering critique. Butler suggests that there can be no final separation of subversive performances from those that they oppose;



Performativity describes this relationship of being implicated in that which one imposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a “pure” opposition, a “transcendence” of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. (Butler 1993: 241)

There is a shift between *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* in terms of ‘performativity’ therefore as Butler is compelled to distinguish between ‘performance’ as a discrete ‘act’ and performativity as a citation of norms which only have force through repetition and which do not promise either the presence or volition of an ‘acting’ subject. Butler turns to Jacques Derrida’s essay *Signature Event Context* (1972) in order to develop her notion of performativity as compulsory repetition. In this essay, Derrida explores the citation of marks and the loss of self-presence in writing “with help from – but in order to go beyond it too – the problematic of the *performative*” (Derrida 1988: 13). Derrida’s main argument concerns the iterability of writing and he explores how any mark is made intelligible through the possibility of its repeat – in order for it to function it cannot be tied either to the writer or the person being addressed.

To be what it is, all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence, it is a rupture in presence, “death,” or the possibility of the “death” of the receiver, inscribed in the structure of the mark ... What holds for the receiver holds also, for the same reasons, for the sender or the producer. To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine that is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten. When I say “my future

disappearance,” it is to render this proposition more immediately acceptable. I ought to be able simply to say my disappearance, pure and simple, my nonpresence in general, for instance the nonpresence of my intention of saying something meaningful, of my wish to communicate, from the emission or production of the mark. (Derrida 1988: 8)

Derrida therefore proposes three “essential predicates in a minimal determination of the classical concept of writing” (1988:9) which concern 1. the ability of the mark to remain and thereby exceed the moment of its inscription, 2. the correlative ability to break with its context and function without the presence or intention of the author, and 3. the constitution of a written sign by a force of rupture which is due to the spacing between the sign and its context “but also from all forms of present reference (whether past or future in the modified form of the present that is past or to come)” (1988:9-10). Derrida argues however that this notion of the absences in the written mark can be extended to include spoken language, which is conventionally held to be the opposite of writing. Rather than suggest that the voice promises the presence of the speaker, Derrida posits that the iteration of spoken language and indeed “all ‘experience’ in general” (1988 :10), means that intelligible communication of any kind requires that the marks (written, oral or presumably non-verbal, although Derrida’s essay does not make that explicit) that constitute it can be repeated and recirculated beyond the intention of the person communicating and in excess of the context in which it is wielded.

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in doing so it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this



iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called “normal”. What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way? (Derrida 1988: 12)

Derrida examines Austin’s work to explore the usefulness of ‘performativity’ for investigating the radical shift in notions of communication when the ‘referent’, “(but here that word is certainly no longer appropriate, and this precisely is the interest of the discovery)” (1988:13), is not outside or preceding, but enacted by the mark. Derrida notes that it “produces or transforms a situation, it effects” (ibid.) but he critiques Austin’s insistence that the intention and presence of the speaker is necessary for this operation. Austin, “implies teleologically that no *residue* escapes the present totalization” (1988:14) whereas it is precisely this remainder that interests Derrida. He therefore focuses on the failure which Austin suggested that speech acts are heir to but asks whether this failure is in fact not only the risk of an infelicitous performative but a necessary part of all performatives. The citation of marks in the absence of their writer is necessarily part of all signification and therefore they will necessarily fail to communicate the pure presence of the subject who utters them and of the context which authorises them.

Contrary to this generalised infelicity Austin offers various categories of felicity, from which he excludes a theatrical citation of a performative, which he suggests is always already unhappy since it is not authorised by the intention of the speaker nor the propriety of context. In a oft-quoted passage he suggests that any conspicuous recitation, or ‘non-serious’ use of a performative renders it void as a sickly copy;

A performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a

sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but on ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (Austin 1976: 22 emphasis in original)

Derrida argues against this exclusion of citation, positing instead that the repetition and loss of original context inherent in a performance is part of all performatives:

For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as an anomaly, exception, "non-serious," *citation* (on the stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a "successful" performative? So that – a paradoxical, but unavoidable conclusion – a successful performative is necessarily an "impure" performative, to adopt the word advanced later on by Austin when he acknowledges that there is no "pure" performative. (Derrida 1988: 17)

Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggest that the 'parasitic' relationship between theatricality and performativity has enjoyed a great deal of attention, not least from Derrida, but they suggest that this quote reveals an Austinian characterisation of theatrical citations as somehow 'queer' in their deformation of performativity. They argue that an association of artifice and perversion creeps into Austin's exclusion of theatricality as an 'etiolation'.

What's so surprising, in a thinker otherwise strongly resistant to moralism, is to discover the pervasiveness with which the excluded theatrical is hereby linked with the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased. We seem with Austinian "etiolation" to



be transported not just to the horticultural laboratory, but back to a very different scene: the Gay 1890's of Oscar Wilde. Striking that, even for the dandyish Austin, theatricality would be inseparable from a normatively homophobic thematics of the "peculiar," "anomalous, exceptional, 'nonserious.'" (Parker and Sedgwick 1995: 5)

I will return to this ambivalence of performing performativity below but here I want to turn to examine how this exclusion of theatricality is repeated in Butler's *Bodies That Matter*. I want to suggest that Butler's separation of performance and performativity actually works to deconstruct these terms rather than shore them up as polar opposites. Butler's return to performance is elaborated in her response to those readings of *Gender Trouble* that construe gender as a performance by a prediscursive subject who chooses what act of gender to put on;

Performativity is...not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical: indeed its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). (Butler 1993:12-13)

Theatricality is then for Butler an integral part of gender performativity but only in the extent to which it disguises its contingency in repetition and assumes a temporal autonomy. She asserts that "*what is "performed" works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake*" (1993: 234, emphasis in original). Much has been made of this opposition that Butler now sets in motion; for example Emily Apter suggests that it evidences a "phobic disinterest in theater history and dramatic art" (Apter 1996: 16), and Elin Diamond posits a parallel with

the exclusion of the 'parasitic' citation discussed above – "performance and theatre discourse are shunned by Butler with a fastidiousness worthy of J.L. Austin himself" (Diamond 2000: 33). Many theatre and performance writers are disappointed in this characterisation of performance as disassembling its basis in repetition but Jon McKenzie (1998) finds it a useful tool to contest the tendency within writings on performance which isolate and reify only the transgressive potentials of 'performance'. McKenzie traces the development of Butler's use of 'performance' and her challenge to notions of ritual articulated by Victor Turner (1982) and Richard Schechner (1985) in their formulation of the emerging field of performance studies. In the shift I have just identified, McKenzie suggests that Butler moves from using a ritualistic-inflected sense of 'performance', coming from Turner which implies a repetition and a social scene of transformation, to a notion of 'performance' as a "an act in the here-and-now, that is, as a presence, bounded in the will of the performer" (McKenzie 1998: 225). This entails a shift in the relationship between performance and performativity, terms which sometimes overlap in the earlier writing but here are distinct (although not oppositional).

Performativity now refers to a discursive compulsion to repeat norms of gender, sexuality, and race, while performance refers to an embodied theatricality that conceals its citational aspect under a dissimulating presence. (McKenzie 1998 :227)

For McKenzie the most promising aspect of Butler's application of performance studies to performativity (and vice versa), is precisely this turn to separate performativity from an idea of performance to examine a compulsory citational process which is not in and of itself subversive. Although McKenzie notes that Butler's use of 'performance' is sometimes confusingly "twisted" (necessarily so), its promise, for him, is that it challenges the orthodoxy of performance studies which places performance as a liminal practice. In her attention to the citationality of performativity and the 'acts' of concealment that now characterise performance,



Butler “*theorizes both the transgressivity and the normativity of performative genres*” (McKenzie 1998: 221, emphasis in original). McKenzie’s focus however is not on ideas of gender and sexuality in performance analysis and so he does not consider fully Butler’s notions of the hyperbolic, of acting-out normative, and often painful, subjection to hegemonic gender norms in ways that theatrically reveal their contingency.

### 1.3 Hyperbolic theatre

The notion of performance again returns when Butler discusses queer activism and here she deploys a notion of ‘theatricality’ which, far from concealing its discursive basis, can excessively overplay the conventions of which it is a repeat. She notes the various ways in which theatrical political protests such as die-ins and kiss-ins reveal the workings of homophobic discourse through hyperbolic excess. Here theatrical practice is one which displays the contingency of homosexual subjection;

Paradoxically, but also with great promise, the subject who is “queered” into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition. This kind of citation will emerge as *theatrical* to the extent that it *mimes and renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also reverses. (Butler 1993: 232, emphasis in original)

‘Theatricality’ therefore performs two functions in *Bodies That Matter*. The earlier use of the term refers to a disavowal of the performative recitation of norms in order to appear as the fictive expression of a volitional subject. Its later use however has the potential to reveal the violence of discourse through hyperbolically enacting the abjection central to hegemonic heterosexual norms. Even though it appears that a subject has to ‘take up’ or cite something, Butler is clear that the

subject is always already within the discursive repetitions it stages. The subject is not at an operational distance from the 'theatre' nor is it expressing a truth about its internal reality but instead is exposing the means whereby homosexuality as an identity is produced through discursive conventions. Unlike Austin however, Butler does not tie the performative to an authorised convention - it is precisely the opportunity to refigure the 'conventions' of gender that the theatrical context seems to offer. This hyperbole is closer therefore to the Derridean notion of 'anomalous' performativity in that gender is, like the Derridean 'mark', "put between quotation marks" in order to "break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (Derrida 1988: 12). Indeed Derrida also suggests that the theatricalised citation that Austin would exclude from analysis can reveal the naturalised citationality of language;

The "non-serious," the *oratio obliqua* will no longer be able to be excluded, as Austin wished, from "ordinary" language. And if one maintains that such ordinary language, or the ordinary circumstances of language, excludes a general citationality or iterability, does that not mean that the "ordinariness" in question – the thing and the notion – shelter a lure, the teleological lure of consciousness (whose motivations, indestructible necessity, and systematic effects would be subject to analysis)? (Derrida 1988:18)

Geraldine Harris (1999) suggests that Derrida's critique of Austin, and Butler's rejection of expressive performance but return to 'theatricality' (what she calls a 'double movement') does not constitute either an outright rejection of 'performance' nor an opposite movement which would designate all citation as performance. Harris argues that a strategic deployment of theatre appears in both writers' work in the form of mimetic repetition.

What Butler and Derrida put into question is not so much whether any distinction can be made between the 'real' and the 'mimetic', but the basis of



any authority which attempts to definitely decide on this difference for everybody, once and for all. As such, it may be that the process of Butler's double movement necessitates a temporary reversal, in which the mimetic must be privileged in order to open up to contestation dominant notions of 'the' real on which that authority depends. A temporary reversal, however, is not the same as a collapse and is only the first stage of a deconstruction, not the end point. Nothing is to be gained if 'the' mimetic simply replaces 'the' real and is perceived as a singular stable term that can operate as a universal touchstone for measuring the self-evident 'truth' of the fundamental fictionality and theatricality of all human experience. (Harris 1999: 75)

The hyperbolic theatrical citation is therefore used by Butler, and to some extent Derrida, in precisely the opposite way to 'expressive performance' i.e. whilst 'performance' conceals the conventions that it repeats in order to appear as the conscious expression of a self-present subject, the 'theatrical' reveals not only its own performative contingency but also deconstructs the naturalisation of a generalised iterability within the 'ordinary', 'non-theatrical' or 'serious'. This adoption of 'theatricality' for a radical performance is the reverse of a movement within Performance Studies, as Parker and Kosofsky-Sedgwick note: "The irony is that, while philosophy has begun to shed some of its anti-theatrical prejudices, theater studies have been attempting, meanwhile, to take themselves out of (the) theater" (1995: 2). I do not want to labour the contradictory Butlerian vagaries of 'theatricality' since Butler is using this term as a means of resisting the collapse of 'performativity' into 'expression' rather than offering a strict typology of citational practices. However, as McKenzie suggests, Butler's deployment of performativity deliberately invokes the charge of catachresis – "it *is* a misuse, and this misuse is itself a strategy of resignification, of queering, of destratification" (McKenzie 2001: 201). The mis-use of 'theatre' can similarly be figured as a strategic unsettling of the term and although Butler sets out to separate the 'dramatic' meaning of

performance from performativity she turns back to encompass it within a notion of hyperbolic theatre.

The troubling convolutions of 'theatricality' are also deployed in the choreographic work under discussion. As already suggested, *Swan Lake*, *Grass*, *The Hypochondriac Bird* and *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* all use expression and mimesis within a theatrical frame but do so with differing effects in relation to the iteration of figures of masculinity and homosexuality. Butler's complex exploration of the performative is particularly useful not simply because her attention is on the production of gendered bodies but also because she emphasises the contingency of the theatrical citation – it is never simply, nor purely, subversive. Its force relies on the context of its emergence while it also potentially engenders new possibilities through its failure to ever repeat faithfully. Nevertheless Butler's discussion of performance or theatre itself is limited – she discusses the theatrical within queer politics through reference to the hyperbolic gestures of protest actions such as Kiss-Ins, Die-Ins and other public rituals of queer desire. These actions reveal the constituent discourses that would render this desire invisible or already deadly and contagious through what she terms "theatrical rage" (1993: 233). Butler later suggests however that it is not simply the force of these actions which enable a resistance to homophobia but their 'readability'. In response to a question concerning the recuperation of queer subversion, Butler argues that the legibility of theatricality is in inverse relation to its political potential.

I would say that subversion is precisely an incalculable effect. That's what makes it subversive...subversive practices have to overwhelm the capacity to read, challenge conventions of reading, and demand new possibilities of reading. (Butler 1994: 38)



Actions such as the Die-Ins were effective inasmuch they drew on conventions of street theatre and non-violent direct action but did so in order to confuse – the dramatics of ‘playing dead’ both cited other protest movements but also quoted the death toll from AIDS, the HIV status of the participants, the social death of homosexuality in ways that weren’t immediately clear – they “posed a set of questions without giving you the set of tools to read off the answers” (ibid.). Once these actions became standard tactics of the movement however, Butler suggests that they lost their edge.

Once they’ve been read, once they’re done too often, they become deadened tropes, as it were. They become predictable. And its precisely when they get predictable, or when you know how to read them in advance, or you know what’s coming, that they just don’t work any more. (Butler 1994: 38)

It would be incorrect to Butler’s argument to suggest that, in this emphasis on the unreadable theatrical, she precludes any ‘reading’ of performance but instead she seems to be arguing for a problematisation of the assumptions of theatrical spectatorship. I will demonstrate that all of the pieces under discussion relate to ‘reading’ in a particular way; Bourne’s disavowal of a reading of homosexuality, de Frutos’s troubling citation of the expressive autobiographical figure and Anderson’s resistance to a reading of expression or interiority. In the next chapter I will explore how the choreographic deployment of hysteria, as a troubling bodily excess, also both demands and resists a ‘reading’ of performance as expressive. As I will elaborate in each individual chapter, the pieces therefore stage a troubling relationship to the notion of ‘reading’ and indeed they offer reflection upon the central tropes of the theatrical presentation of masculinity. In the essay ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’, Butler stresses a difference between a non-theatrical performance context and the theatre in order to argue that ‘reality’

is preserved within theatres as untouchable by whatever subversions occur on the stage;

It seems clear that, although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performance in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions. Indeed, the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence. The conventions which mediate proximity and identification in these two instances are clearly quite different...In the theatre, one can say, 'this is just an act,' and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real. Because of this distinction, one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play' allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life. On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act, indeed, on the street or in the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no conventions that facilitate making this separation. (1990a: 278)

None of the pieces I discuss take place on the street or the bus but within highly conventional settings – theatres with a separation between audience and performer, within the set time frame of an evening performance (around an hour for de Frutos's and Anderson's work, around two and a half for Bourne's) and all are fairly recognisable and 'readable' as pieces of contemporary dance. To some extent therefore the choreography is already circumscribed by 'deadened tropes' of western theatre tradition and certain events can be 'predicted' according to these



conventions. Geraldine Harris takes up Butler's distinction between the stage and the street to suggest that an application of Butler's notion of radical performance to theatrical work is complicated precisely by the tropes of theatre. Butler is writing within the conventions of philosophy and comparative literature, and therefore drawing on different conventions from theatrical presentation and analysis. Harris argues that quotation, mimesis and hyperbole are part of the traditions of theatre – indeed she proposes that 'performance' distinguishes itself by the obviousness of its citation. Any performative within this context is therefore always already a quote.

The reason theatre as an institution is so attractive and yet so problematic to theorists of performativity is because it has traditionally been perceived as both quoting the 'reality effects' they describe as being performatively produced and as simultaneously differing from those 'reality effects' – which is, of course, exactly the effect they seek to achieve as a strategy for subverting identity in the realm of the social. However, in order to be intelligible as such, a theatrical performance depends on the legible presence of the quotation marks, which, as described by Butler, the process of performativity as citation operates to conceal in 'everyday life'. In short, to state the obvious, any sort of act or 'movement' within the theatrical frame or otherwise is already marked as double, already in quotation marks. (Harris 1999: 76)

This doubling of citation in the theatre, (the etiolation that Austin sought to exclude from consideration) therefore complicates any analysis of performance – if the hyperbolic act in the streets at a protest, for instance, reveals and reverses the discourses of which it is a repetition then in the theatre it is a repetition of the notion and context of 'theatre'. Hyperbolic practice within theatrical contexts does not necessarily deploy excessive mimesis in order to disrupt conventions of identity but, on the contrary, to conform to performance tropes. Harris suggests that this is



a difference concerned with the legibility of quotation marks – in conventional performance the apparent ‘falsity’ of the situation preserves a reference to a naturalised non-citational ‘reality’. She argues that, “the presence of these quotation marks, without which a theatrical performance cannot be said to take place, are themselves performatively produced, through the citation of specific theatrical conventions which precede, constrain and exceed the performance and gives it the appearance of arising from the performer’s or author’s will and of being a ‘bounded act’” (Harris 1999: 77). Therefore it seems that obvious citation in a theatrical context is part of the expressive model of identity that Butler and Derrida are seeking to deconstruct. Through an emphasis on the constructed nature of performed identity, ‘theatre’ is produced and maintained against the real. Harris’s discussion of theatrical conventions therefore echoes Butler’s cautionary description of performance as dissembling and concealing performativity in order to preserve a ‘reality’ impervious to change.

Harris’s argument is not however to rule out the use of performativity when examining theatrical performance, indeed in her insightful and surprising analysis of work by Rose English, Bobby Baker and Annie Sprinkle, Harris uses Butler’s theories of drag performance in order to examine the gender trouble that can be enacted when considering these artists as male drag performers. Harris’s point is that the citational conventions of theatre need to be taken into account when using Butlerian theory and she suggests that the difference from ‘reality’ inherent in theatrical contexts can be unfaithfully repeated and rendered ambiguous – “Indeed, a tendency to improperly cite this difference and therefore open it up to contestation has always been a feature of performance practice and the source of its ‘danger’” (Harris 1999: 77). Theatrical practice need not sustain itself against a ‘reality’ but can turn upon the conventions of ‘reality’ as in the ambiguous hysteria of de Frutos’s choreography or the haunting blankness of Anderson’s pastiches. By explicitly placing ‘expression’ in quotation marks (and thereby rendering it as doubly cited – “”expression””) the pieces under discussion frustrate any easy



recourse to a natural body before the performance, or any 'real' experience underneath the theatrical – this doesn't prevent critics from trying and I will explore how de Frutos's work in particular is closed down by readings of his dancing as autobiography – but nevertheless it does trouble the readability of 'masculinity' performed on stage.

Butler suggests that "proximity and identification" construct the relational differences of 'reality' between stage and street, and it is precisely these that I turn to examine in the next chapter, but here it is worth pointing out that spectatorship is never as distanced or ordered as the architecture of theatres suggest. The voyeur in the darkened auditorium is perhaps different from the accidental audience in the street but in both cases 'reality' is negotiated through embodied processes of looking that require a complex host of relations between self and other which necessarily fail to finally form a subject distinct from the performance it gazes upon (whether 'real' or 'theatrical'). Proximity and identification on the bus are not the same as in the theatre (or in front of the video, or sitting at the computer, or reading this text) but performativity offers a way of rethinking the contingency of these relations because contexts cannot fully circumscribe the operation of a performative and the acknowledgement of a constitutive infelicity allows for unforeseen effects which can dramatically reconfigure the performance of subjectivity.

#### 1.4 Choreographic Citation

Butler's complex engagement of the 'acts' of both drama and performativity suggests that, despite her reservations about the theatre, performance is in some senses necessary to the analysis of gender. She draws a parallel with the necessity of the actor for a script in that "gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but



which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again” (1990a: 277). Elin Diamond notes that performance can both reify and contest the citational practices that it engages but she argues that the problematics of examining performativity in performance are a necessary challenge.

When performativity materializes as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique. Performativity, I would suggest, must be rooted in the materiality and historical density of performance. (Diamond 1996: 5)

Susan Leigh Foster in *Choreographies of Gender* also argues that ‘gender performativity’ is useful only inasmuch it is used in a historically specific analysis of bodily movement. Butler suggests that gender “is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1990b: 140). Foster suggests that it is precisely these embodied mundanities that Butler ignores in favour of discursive repetitions.

In her only reading of a nonprinted text, the film *Paris is Burning*, Butler notes the categories of character types that are performed at the drag balls and their costuming, but she never examines the eclectic movement vocabularies and the sequencing of those vocabularies through which social commentary is generated. She considers the relationship between pedestrian and stage identities without actually detailing the ranges of exaggerative and ironic gestures used in each site. Only by assessing the articulateness of bodies’ motions as well as speech, I would argue, can the



interconnectedness of racial, gendered, and sexual differences within and among these bodies matter. (Foster 1998: 4)

Foster however proposes that gender should be read not as 'performance' but as 'choreography' and she separates these according to notions of presence and iteration. Foster's delineation of 'performance' is similar to that of Butler's in that she suggests that it appears as the manifestation of the performers will or expression and it operates as a 'bounded act' which conceals the conventions that it repeats. Choreography on the other hand is a citational process of marking which demonstrates the historicity of bodily iterations and which sites the body in a social context.

Choreography, the tradition of codes and conventions through which meaning is constructed in dance, offers a social and historical analytical framework for the study of gender, whereas performance concentrates on the individual execution of such codes. Choreography resonates with cultural values concerning bodily, individual, and social identities, whereas performance focuses on the skill necessary to represent those identities. Choreography presents a structuring of deep and enduring cultural values that replicates similar sets of values elaborated in other cultural practices, whereas performance emphasizes the idiosyncratic interpretation of those values. Like performativity, choreography consists in sets of norms and conventions; yet unlike performativity, or at least its general usage thus far, choreography encompasses corporeal as well as verbal articulateness.

(Foster 1998: 5)

Choreography is then, for Foster, a form of embodied writing which is legible only through the repetition of recognisable marks and further, these are codes and practices which exceed their instantiation in any particular performance. Although in this particular essay Foster only engages with Derrida in order to take him to



task over his interview with Christie McDonald entitled *Choreographies* (1995) where he “stages a delirious fantasy in which the problem of sexual difference evaporates (fleeting as dance itself)” (Foster 1998: 21), her discussion of choreography clearly has sympathies with the Derridean outline of writing, discussed above. In *Textual Evidences* she suggests that choreography is a theory of bodies, written by bodies (1995b: 234) and in *Choreographing History* Foster reiterates the notion of choreography as “a bodily writing” (1995a: 4).<sup>2</sup> To recap Derrida’s “essential predicates” of writing; the mark has to remain and exceed the moment of its inscription, to operate without the presence of the author and break from its context and be constituted by a rupture between the sign and the referent. As previously suggested, Derrida’s main focus is on writing, and he also includes speaking (partly because he is considering the ‘speech acts’ of performativity) but his analysis does gesture obliquely towards bodily marks;

This structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context) seems to me to make of every mark, even if oral, a grapheme in general, that is, as we have seen, the nonpresent *remaining* of a differential mark cut off from its alleged “production” or origin. And I will extend this law even to all “experience” in general, if it is granted that there is no experience of *pure* presence, but only chains of differential marks. (Derrida 1988: 94, emphasis in original)

The grapheme in *choreography* could therefore be considered as the remainder, or the excess that is cut off from the presence of the performance. There are various citations from balletic vocabulary in Bourne’s *Swan Lake*, for example, and these are marks that, in order to operate as recognisable movements, clearly precede and remain after the instance of the performance. These balletic marks have a complex history but they do not always signify the same ‘referent’ and Bourne’s *Swan Lake* reveals how an arabesque can be cited in ways unfaithful to any notion of origin. Furthermore *Swan Lake* is, at time of writing, still touring with different



casts – Bourne’s choreography itself therefore is a form of text which can be altered and reconfigured in the individual performance but which, in order to operate as ‘Swan Lake’ must be repeatable without either Bourne, as the author or Adam Cooper as the performer. As I will discuss in more detail, Lea Anderson’s work in particular focuses on the quotation of marks which precede her choreography – not only does she explicitly cite figures from Egon Schiele’s images, but she reveals the failure and blankness that result from this performative invocation. Javier de Frutos’s work also draws on a complex range of choreographic marks, from ‘sex’ to ‘flamenco’, but his pieces stress how these are discursively intertwined with notions of identity – his choreography is a complex taking up of texts that have already written his body out of heterosexual masculine narratives.

Foster suggests that choreography has an advantage over the notion of a ‘scripted’ performance in that “the legacy of the dramatic text continues to infuse the script with a kind of permanence, whereas the notion of choreography as a theoretical premise also underscores the changeability of events and their environs” (Foster 1998: 28). As I argue with respect to ‘Swan Lake’ there is no opportunity to return to an ‘original’ *Swan Lake* since the ballet has mutated widely since the late nineteenth century – the method of passing ballet within companies through demonstration means that any text exists primarily within the bodies of the dancers rather than as a widely circulated resource such as play texts. Of course there are musical scores, librettos, notations and, more recently, videos but the notion of a single, authoritative *Swan Lake* is impossible due to the very embodied nature of the text. Choreography is a particular kind of writing that therefore seemingly leaves no physical trace (and therefore would seem to fail to meet the first of Derrida’s predicates of writing) – however Foster’s argument is that ‘performance’ is ephemeral but ‘choreography’ leaves residues in the cultural repertoire of bodies that any choreographic work cites and recontextualises – it is “what resonates with other systems of representation that together constitute the cultural moment within



which all bodies circulate” (Foster 1998: 17).

Foster’s insistence on the cultural script seems over dogmatic however when she asserts that “no matter how dynamic the dancing...the choreographic specifications underlying these performances remain the same” (Foster 1998: 11) and this inevitability is echoed when she suggests that “any body, discontented with the regimen of behaviors assigned to it, can alter its participation in the regimen but can hardly effect serious change in the content of the regimen itself” (1998: 27). Whilst it is important to stress the compulsory and pervasive nature of gender norms, Foster returns to a notion of intentionality when she argues that only the will of the choreographer can effect real change in the choreographies of gender. Although the text of ‘masculinity’ predates the performances under discussion the impossibility of ever doing it correctly means that the text itself is potentially altered, not simply badly performed. These radical failures do not depend upon a political intention – neither the presence of the choreographer, or the dancer, is fully expressed through the citation of choreographic marks of gender – indeed it is the rupturing of any mark by non-presence which theories of performativity attend to and identify as offering a rewrite of the texts of subjectivity.

Foster does consider the impermanence of a disappearing body but she designates this as ‘performance’ which is separate from her formulation of choreography as a cultural marking of and by bodies. In order to think the disappearance of the body together with Foster’s useful notion of choreography I now turn to consider Butler’s exploration of the ‘body’ in accounts of subjectivity together with writings on performance, and writings on writing about performance, to further examine the potential of the performative moments of bodily citation. In doing so I want to engage the various concealments, blindings and dematerialisations evoked in discussions of this absent body.



## 1.5 Disappearing Acts and Repeat Performances

In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997b) Butler examines Hegel's master-slave dynamic in which the freed slave replicates the bond of slavery by taking (his) body as an object. This turning back on oneself, taking the body as object so as to become autonomous, is a key feature of the theories of subjection that Butler elaborates. In her analysis of Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish*, she suggests that "the body" as such is not a blank site built upon by power but is produced and subsumed through subjection;

The subject appears at the expense of the body, an appearance conditioned in inverse relation to the disappearance of the body.

The subject not only effectively takes the place of the body but acts as the soul which frames and forms the body in captivity... The body is not a site on which a construction takes place; it is a destruction on the occasion of which a subject is formed. The formation of this subject is at once the framing, subordination, and regulation of the body, and the mode in which that destruction is preserved (in the sense of sustained and embalmed) *in* normalisation. (Butler 1997b: 92)

The subject emerges therefore upon the vanishing act of the body but importantly, for Butler, this body is *repeated produced* as a deferment and the reiteration of its disappearance is necessary for the continuation of the subject. In *Bodies That Matter*, the material body is also posited as a founding exclusion, the absence of which calls upon signification - "*a demand in and for language*, a "that which" ...calls to be explained, described, diagnosed...fed, exercised, mobilised, put to sleep, a site of enactments and passions of various kinds" (Butler 1993: 67). This is however a body *posited* as a demand - Butler critiques the retroactive positioning

of the body as the referent of the signification of gender. She suggests that materiality should not be figured as either the cause of language or outside of it;

Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully exceeds the other. Always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different. (Butler 1993:69)

'The body' is therefore considered as *performatively* situated outside or prior to signification but this performativity for Butler reveals how it is immanent with its symbolic representation - it is discursively regulated but also exceeds efforts to delimit it. Any destruction of the body will only be a partial, repeated vanishing, which will be commensurate with the appearance of its excessive remains. In *Excitable Speech*, (1997a) Butler explores further the excess of the body. Here Butler's focus moves from written language to speech and she draws upon Shoshana Felman's notion of the "scandalous" body whose demeanour can alter a performative utterance;

In speaking, the act that the body is performing is never fully understood; the body is the blindspot of speech, that which acts in excess of what is said, but which also acts in and through what is said. That the speech act is a bodily act means that the act is redoubled in the moment of speech: there is what is said, and then there is a kind of saying that the bodily "instrument" of the utterance performs. (1997a: 11)

Here a subtle change has occurred in Butler's discussion of the body as she moves from a consideration of text-based language to spoken discourse. The



body is less a “demand” for language, but an “instrument” of speech which is neither collapsible into speech (which is always a bodily act) nor radically separate from it. It nevertheless has its own “speech” and the body can redouble performative acts to exceed the meaning and understanding of any act. This is further elaborated however when Butler suggest that this speaking body is not “present” in any conventional way;

To argue that the body is equally absent in speech and writing is true only to the extent that neither speech nor writing makes the body immediately present. But the ways in which the body obliquely appears in speech is, of necessity, different from the way it appears in writing . . . The speech act . . . communicates not merely what is said, but the bearing of the body as the rhetorical instrument of expression. (Butler 1997a: 152)

It seems therefore that the ‘destroyed’ body is both present and absent in Butler’s formulation of performative acts - indeed in a move that exceeds both writing and speaking it becomes a body whose presence/absence can both disrupt intelligibility and yet communicate in a language of its own above and beyond what is being said. This raises several questions. Is this excessive communication the language of dance performance? Does dancing make the body ‘immediately present’ or does it, like writing and speaking, engage with the absent body? Butler’s own writing on ‘performance’ considers the dissimulating effect of the appearance of a ‘bounded’ act which presumably covers this absence at the heart of performativity. Rebecca Schneider suggests that Butler’s characterisation of the relationship between performance and performativity turns on several tropes of visibility and blindness in relation to the absent body;

For Butler, conscious performance conceals discursive performativity through utilising blinds, like scrims, in the interest of mounting a present-

momentness of an act which disavows its historicity – which attempts to *pass* as that which it repeats, closeting the space between firsts and seconds... Such a performance act, in ritual and theater, in all social performative actions, thus both institutes and manipulates blindness. Performativity, on the other hand, is the discursive conventionality that is concealed and manipulated by performance. Thus we are concerned with a double blinding: To say that theatrical performance, or social ritual, conceals performativity even as it performs is in essence to say that it conceals, or blinds itself to the blindness within which it necessarily operates. (Schneider 2000: 30)

In order to explore these acts of concealment Schneider reads *Excitable Speech* and in particular the parable, quoted from Toni Morrison, of an old blind woman who is taunted by children to guess whether the bird they hold in their hands is dead – ‘Its in your hands’ replies the old woman (Butler 1997a: 6). Butler uses the story to explore the violence of language and the use of performative threats to secure a subject in place – the children interpellate the blind woman into a position of vulnerability. The woman’s reply reverses this call however by returning the threat to the bodies of the children – “illuminating the blindness that motivates their speech act, the question of what they will do, in a bodily sense, given what they have already done, bodily, in speaking as they have” (Butler 1997a: 12). Butler’s point then is that the children attempt to disavow their bodies (and thereby their own complicity and vulnerability in the speech acts) but the blind woman exposes them to the blindspot of their threat. Schneider however suggests that Butler’s exploration of the excessive body marks the body as the limit of the visible and therefore preserves it as an absence which cannot be acknowledged

The speaking body is always in ‘excess’ of that which it iterates, as is the body which speech addresses – a body which can not be fully fixed by language even as language interpolates the body for social constitution.



And yet, as if to try and *fix* this lack of bodily fixity, Butler articulates that lack by rendering the body blind, or blinding (veiling) the body, fixing it as the 'sign of unknowingness'. (Schneider 2000: 31)

Contrary to Schneider's accusation however, Butler does examine the 'knowingness' of the body. Indeed in the final chapter of *Excitable Speech* Butler reads performativity between Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu in order to consider both the ruptures of writing and the social rituals of performance. Neither offer an "account of the social iterability of the utterance" (1997a: 150) however so Butler uses the notion of the *habitus* drawn from Bourdieu – which she characterises as "those embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own 'obviousness'" (1997a: 152). Bourdieu does not link the *habitus* with performativity but Butler argues that the rituals are repeated over time in order to enact the body. Whereas Bourdieu's discussions of performativity stress the social power of the one who speaks, Butler draws on Derrida to both counter this reliance on pre-existing power relations and to suggest that the *habitus* can be disrupted and recontextualised at the level of the bodily citation. The body in Butler's figuration of performativity is excessive in the sense that it is never finally or thoroughly constituted in language – it remains open to both the future and the past and is never fully self-present. Like the Derridean mark it is constituted through rupture and it is not tied to a single referent. Schneider's suggestion that the body is conflated with blindness in traditional theatre is a useful supplement to Butler's theories however since the acts of concealment which characterise performance should be read as performative citations which prioritise the visual over the bodily. Just as language fails to ever fully constitute the body, so the visible fails to ever fully capture materiality.

Peggy Phelan has also focused upon the disappearance of the body in performance, and like Schneider she suggests that radical live art can disrupt attempts to conceal the absence of the body. In *Unmarked* (1993), Phelan

dedicates a chapter to “The ontology of performance : representation without reproduction” and argues for the radical ontological status of performance, afforded by its ephemeral nature, that allows it to operate outside an economy of exchange value and reproduction.

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations : once it does so, it becomes something other than performance...Performance’s being...becomes itself through disappearance (Phelan 1993: 146).

Performance, for Phelan, therefore has a “being” and it is one that exists only upon the condition of its disappearance, and is strictly delineated according to this condition; reproduction has the ability to transform this being into something other than performance and to betray the “promise of its own ontology” (ibid.).

The ‘promise’ of performance is, for Phelan, the restructuring of gender to a logic not determined by metaphor. Because its existence is at the point of disappearance, performance cannot operate within the reproductive economy of metaphorisation but instead works metonymically;

For performance art ...the referent is always the agonisingly relevant body of the performer...In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of “presence”. But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else - dance, movement, sound, character, “art.” (Phelan 1993: 150)

Performance is therefore a string of replacements rather than a hierarchy of relations. The referent, the agonising body, appears as a displacement of self but this appearance by the body (which in this passage is synonymous with ‘the performer’) is actually a disappearance as dance and art supplant the body.



Phelan suggests that this final displacement reveals that the body requires a supplement, that it cannot appear without the mediation of a cultural determinant such as 'art'. This seems to be similar to Foster's argument concerning the relationship between choreography and performance but whereas Foster advocates an examination of the former, Phelan's emphasis is directed towards the latter. Phelan suggests that writing about performance needs to take into account this disappearance rather than suture the absences at the heart of live art.

The challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself. The act of writing towards disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the expression of subjectivity itself. (Phelan 1993: 148)

Phelan's 'performative writing' is not a writing *about* the performativity of performance but a writing that mimics the disappearances of the moment of performance. Citing both Austin and Derrida, Phelan suggests that the performative acknowledges there is a referent which exists external and alien to writing thus preserving the 'agonising' referent of the body as external to both performance and performativity. This is in direct opposition to the readings of both Austin and Derrida earlier in this chapter – although performativity is 'non-referential' this doesn't separate the act of speaking, writing or choreography from a referent which is unchanged by the citationality of the mark as Shoshana Felman suggests:

The referent is itself produced by language as its own *effect*... This means that between language and referent there is no longer a simple opposition (nor is there identity, on the other hand): language makes itself part of what it refers to (without, however, being all that it refers to). Referential knowledge of language is not knowledge *about* reality (about a separate and

distinct entity), but knowledge that *has to do with reality*, that acts within reality, since it is itself – at least in part – what this reality is made of. The referent is no longer simply a preexisting *substance*, but an *act*, that is, a dynamic movement of modification of reality. (Felman 1983: 76-77)

Butler's figuration of performativity also suggests that the 'referent' of sex is not external to gender but enacted through the citation of the stylisation of the body which figures an expressive depth. If the body is not fully present in language this does not mean it is external to it. Performativity is productive of the disappearing body, not simply a report on its absence. Phelan's argument however is that the body 'proper' is preserved through this displacement as somehow outside of representation and therefore not constituted through it. According to Phelan's metonymic model of performance the body is perpetually displaced but it is to a place outside of reproduction or representation. This configuration allows her to assert that performance holds the promise of resisting the reproduction of the metaphor of gender;

a metaphor which upholds the vertical hierarchy of value through systematic marking of the positive and the negative. In order to enact this marking, the metaphor of gender presupposes unified bodies which are biologically different. More specifically, these unified bodies are different in "one" aspect of the body, that is to say, difference is located in the genitals. . . The genitals themselves are forever hidden within metaphor , and metaphor, as a "cultural worker," continually converts difference into the Same. The joined task of metaphor and culture is to reproduce itself; it accomplishes this by turning two (or more) into one. By valuing one gender and marking it (with the phallus) culture reproduces one sex and one gender, the hommo-sexual. (Phelan 1993: 151)



For Phelan therefore gender is a relation of values that sustains itself through a reference to bodies that are organised according to its paradigm. This hierarchy is however seen to dissolve itself into one term, the masculine Same. Phelan, with echoes of Irigaray, argues that this works to performatively erase women from representation through metaphor. Performance for her however does not rely upon the appearance of a unified body - it “approaches the Real through resisting the reduction of the two into the one. But in moving from the aims of metaphor, reproduction, and pleasure to those of metonymy, displacement, and pain, performance marks the body itself as loss” (Phelan 1993: 152).

In her concluding chapter Phelan moves briefly from her Lacanian influenced critique to consider Judith Butler’s reading of melancholia in Freud’s writing. Phelan interprets Butler’s work as tracing a cross gender incorporation - “when the girl ‘loses’ the beloved father she incorporates him. After this internalization, her own gender can no longer be self-identical, but is rather ‘doubled’. It is the same for boys and mothers” (Phelan 1993: 172). This analysis allows her to maintain that the gendering of bodies works according to a strict binary relation that is unstable due to crossings but remains within the unequal hierarchical metaphor. This however ignores Butler’s emphasis on the production of gender through *homosexual* melancholic incorporation in her reading of identification, discussed in detail in the next chapter. Indeed in *Gender Trouble* Butler suggests that the girl can lose the father only upon the condition that she has first lost female object attachments and assumed “her own gender” through incorporation. Phelan’s analysis therefore loses the homosexual in order for her to replicate a heterosexual model of gender incorporation<sup>3</sup> - her suggestion that gender is unstable due to identificatory crossings locates this instability in the Imaginary psyche of the individual rather than in the Symbolic representation of gender which in Phelan’s analysis maintains its autonomous power despite the constitutive insecurity;

Subjectivity is performed. This subjectivity is encoded as always already gendered. And always already more insecure for and about women. Representation functions to make gender, and sexual difference more generally, secure and securely singular - which is to say masculine. (She ghosts him). (Phelan 1993: 172)

Masculinity is reproduced here as a representational monolith that is haunted by femininity but is not intrinsically insecure - there is something like "Masculinity" which includes an identification with "Femininity" but incorporates this as a loss which is not given the agency to disrupt its security nor encroach upon the domain of representation. I would argue however that the figure of loss both constitutes *and* potentially disrupts hegemonic gender norms. Loss for Phelan is always gendered but not constitutive of gender; performance, in Phelan's terms, reveals this loss but does not reproduce the 'metaphor' of gender. Yet if subjectivity is always already gendered and if the loss that conditions the dis/appearance of the body occurs across (and I would argue within) gender then the ontology of performance would seem to be concerned exactly with reproduction, in which the loss returns to haunt gender.

Heidi Gilpin (1996), shares certain concerns with Phelan's work in that she identifies the main constituents of movement performance as displacement and disappearance. Displacement is implicated in the perception of performance in that the bodies in motion vanish to be replaced by "movement". The reading of 'movement', which would include this thesis, according to Gilpin involves further displacement : "In the act of interpreting movement, then, there is the displacement of a displacement" (Gilpin 1996: 108). Gilpin draws upon Freud's use of *Entstellung* to define 'displacement' as not only replacement with another object, but also distortion, deformation and disfigurement - performance analysis therefore is constituted by a double displacement that involves by necessity a misreading of the body which is already misrepresented by movement. The body in performance



is therefore always disappearing but where Phelan argues that performance marks this loss without recourse to reproduction, Gilpin argues that it is in and through repetition that performance reveals the loss:

By implication or desire, performance is constantly orientated towards the impossible desire to stop disappearance. If disappearance is a condition of performance, repetition is a crucial strategy that calls attention to the very fact of disappearance, that manifests the absent presences of that which has disappeared. (Gilpin 1996: 110)

Although it would seem that this is counter to Phelan's argument it is important to note how 'reproduction' in Phelan's text is not collapsible into 'repetition' in Gilpin's. Phelan is specifically concerned with the reproduction of hegemonic gendered representations whereas Gilpin uses repetition both in terms of a choreographic structural device and a psychoanalytical desire to replay traumatic events. Gilpin contends that the use of repetition in movement performance by choreographers and its reception by an audience is conditioned by pleasure and the unpleasurable in relation to the control of the trauma of loss, disappearance and failure. The danced-pleasurable could therefore be construed as that which repeats gender trauma in ways that suture loss and failure whereas the danced-unpleasurable repeats and reinscribes these losses without any closure or resolution. Gilpin has written elsewhere on Pina Bausch's Tanztheater and this description of performance is very seductive when considering the spectacles of repetitive suffering in Bausch's work. Gilpin's analysis in the following passage is however based in desire, whether conscious or subconscious, and presupposes a subject in place that either uses repetition (the choreographer) or responds to it (the audience).

Movement performance looks at the longing to control experience and reinscribes over and over the failure to achieve it. Whether this is pleasurable or not for the spectators of such reinscriptions remains a question. If we follow Freud's reasoning, if a spectator perceives an event repeated on stage as unpleasurable, according to Freud, such an event is most probably traumatic for that person, and she or he would seek to gain control over this event by enduring its repeated enactments. For the choreographer, the use of repetition upon certain phrases of movement, upon certain events, indicates that such movements or events might be either unpleasurable or pleasurable. In either case repetition in performance indicates a desire to master, or at least comment upon, the event being repeated. (Gilpin 1996 : 110-111)

If, as Phelan asserts, "Subjectivity is performed," and it is based in loss then trauma is constitutive of the subject which can not be said to pre-exist it nor wield it unilaterally for pleasure. Pleasure in performance could therefore involve a subjectification according to the dominant norms governing legitimate gendered subjects - and this in part forms Phelan's argument that 'performance' (of the radical kind) is concerned with pain. It could nevertheless also involve a dissolution of the subject - as Burt (1998) argues with reference to the queer male dancing body - "it invents new fragmentary and dissolving subject positions from which to experience a radically revised imagination of the body's capacity for pleasure" (Burt 2001: 222). Repetition, pleasure and loss can consequently be argued as the condition of the subject in performance rather than its object and indeed they work in ways that are both normative and subversive to undo this opposition. This is not to argue against Gilpin's attention to the use of repetition in the structure of a performance (many of the examples discussed in this thesis employ choreographic repetition in various productive ways) but to warn against the conflation of this with the reiteration of performatives that constitute the subject.



Although both Phelan's and Gilpin's texts involve a different approach to repetition, performance for both writers is ontologically distinct from the repeat or the reproduced. The 'liveness' of performance involves a unique event that emerges in an immediate rush towards disappearance - an event that is almost without a history since it is not itself a repeat or development but something that has a distinctive 'being'. Repetition and reproduction are, for Phelan and Gilpin, the antithesis of the performed event and although they may attempt to arrest its disappearance, performance passes instantaneously from presence to absence and remains separate from any move that seeks to confer upon its temporal uniqueness a permanent, reproducible status. Performance therefore has a radical ontology that places it outside of the metaphor of gender (Phelan) where the body disappears and forces a reconsideration of the displacement of presence (Gilpin). Although I am in agreement with the notion of performance involving a dialogue between the present and the absent, the eulogy for the disappeared body in both Phelan and Gilpin's work demands certain qualifications. This thesis suggests that what constitutes this body itself are acts of disappearance. If the gendered body is constituted through repeated, recited performative acts, as is argued above with reference to Judith Butler's work, then the disappearance of the body in performance is itself a repeat, not an ontologically pure event nor by necessity a radical or subversive movement. What appears and what disappears is contingent upon what has always already been displaced through subjection to hegemonic bodily norms. Performance is repetition and reproduction inasmuch as repetition and reproduction are performative of the disappearing body.

In *The Specters of Marx* (1994), Jacques Derrida examines the work of, and on, Marx with an emphasis placed upon what is excluded, pronounced dead, but what nevertheless returns to haunt the discourse of the end of Marxism. Derrida proposes a notion of a specter as a repeat, a return, and the English version of Derrida's text leaves untranslated his use of *revenant* which means not only a ghost but "that which comes back" (Derrida 1994:175 n.1). The event of a

haunting is therefore a return of an exclusion but one in which the temporal order of past, present and future is challenged by the manifestation of the specter; “Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. . . Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*” (Derrida 1994: 10 emphasis in original). The ghost appears in order to disappear. Indeed the appearance is conditioned by both its past disappearance and its future disappearance and, as with both writing and performativity, the specter is constituted through a deconstruction of presence and absence.

What is the time and what is the history of the specter? Is there a present of the specter? Are its comings and goings ordered according to the linear succession of a before and an after, between a present-past, a present-present, and a present-future, between a “realtime” and a “deferred time”? If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. (Derrida 1994: 39)

The specter therefore gestures towards Butler’s notion of the body which is both produced through the past and open to the future but never fully present nor absent from performativity. A hauntological enquiry is therefore one which acknowledges that any ontology (of performance, of gender) is based in the performative production of ghosts - the materialisation of hegemonic norms requires and instances a simultaneous dematerialisation of exclusion that nevertheless constitute those norms – “Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every



hegemony” (Derrida 1994:37). Phelan’s ‘ontology’ of performance which escapes hegemonic gender therefore needs to be reconsidered for its hauntings. In an article concerning the performance spectacle of Princess Diana’s death, Diana Taylor (1999) suggests that performance can be read with Derrida’s specters as, “a (quasi-magical) invocational practise. . . It conjures up and makes visible not just the “live” but the powerful army always already living. The power of seeing through performance is the recognition that we’ve seen it all before - the fantasies that shape our sense of self, of community, that organize our scenarios of interaction, conflict and resolution” (Taylor 1999: 65). Taylor proposes that any spectacle is based in the repeat and return of fantasies, indeed she argues against Phelan’s rejection of reproduction that I have outlined above.

For Phelan, the defining feature of performance – that which separates it from all other phenomena – is that it is “live” and “disappears” without a trace. The way I see it, performance makes visible (for an instant, “live,” “now”) that which is always already there – the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life. These specters, made manifest through performance, alter future phantoms, future fantasies. (Taylor 1999: 64)

In *Mourning Sex* (1997) Phelan’s writing on the disappearing body however shifts to consider precisely this ghostliness – indeed she locates her performative writing within a phantasmagoria of the living dead.

Performance and theatre make manifest something both more than and less than “the body.” And yet the acts made visible in theatre and performance are acts that we attribute over and over again to bodies, often immaterial and phantasmatic ones... The enactment of invocation and disappearance undertaken by performance and theatre is precisely the drama of corporeality itself. At once a consolidated fleshly form and an eroding,

decomposing formlessness, the body beckons us and resists our attempts to remake it. This resistant beckoning was the lure for this writing, a writing toward and against bodies who die. (Phelan 1997: 3-4)

André Lepecki advances a similar argument when he suggests that dance performance invokes “the space of apparitions, of ghosts, of illusion in representation” (Lepecki 1996:75) and therefore this “choreographic play of invisibilities challenges the critical fetishism of thinking, writing and seeing dance as that which pertains only to the visual” (ibid.) Lepecki suggests that memory is the key element both in dancing and in writing and both disappear, they move from visible to invisible but what can be seen is already defined by what is unseen; the specters of performance. Lepecki differs from Phelan in his suggestion of an equality between writing and dance – whereas Phelan proposes a new kind of poetic performative writing to deal with the loss in and of performance, Lepecki suggests that all writing engages the past, present and future bodies of a dance “in this mimetic/mnemonic theatre of writing, in the resulting tension between materiality and spectrality, the dance is put into motion again, surfacing as an image between desire and repression” (1996: 72). Although neither Lepecki or Phelan cite the Derridean specter it can nevertheless be argued that both are proposing a hauntological enquiry into both performance and writing about performance. Rather than search for original moments of pure presence which disappear, dance writing needs to consider the movements of absences which both predate the performance and condition the materialisation of bodies on stage but which can nevertheless return in ways that unfaithfully repeat the exclusions of gender hegemony. The remains of choreography therefore exceed the choreographer, the dancer and the writer and the iterations of gendered bodies in all these contexts both cites an ‘expressive’ presence and produces a performative deferral of a full manifestation.



## 1.6 Conclusions

If choreography is an embodied writing that engages not only the disappearing body in performance but the performative reappearance of the cultural norms concerning gender, and if writing too is a reiteration of marks that “must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general” (Derrida 1988: 8) then there are a host of bodies involved in this thesis – the dancers, the choreographers, audiences, critics, philosophers, mine, yours – but also the evocation of bodies past and future in the recitation of masculinity and its potential rearticulation in the moment of dancing and writing. If ‘the body’ is itself constantly disappearing in the reiterative structure of choreographic writing then this is a production of an absent body, not a pure material body that escapes being caught in the field of vision. What appears in order to disappear is always already caught up in the discursive production of gendered bodies but, as Butler suggests, gender depends upon certain acts, attachments, and identifications remaining unseen (and yet not completely invisible);

“Intelligible” genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the “expression” or “effect” of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (Butler 1990b: 17)

Dominant norms of gender, “sex”, sexuality and identity are therefore always already haunted by incoherence and the threat of unintelligibility. Butler’s work, in *Gender Trouble* and all her later texts, is concerned specifically with deconstructing

these hauntings and she moves between Foucauldian and Derridean poststructuralist accounts of subjectivity, which I have discussed here, and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical investigations of identificatory processes, which I will discuss in the following chapter. Derrida suggests that philosophical encounters with ghosts involve what he terms 'mourning';

It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead . . .to know who and where, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies - for it must stay in its place. In a safe place. (Derrida 1994 : 9)

As discussed in the next chapter, Butler also theorises 'mourning' (hers is a reading of Freudian mourning) but although her work involves the identification of the spectres (in the translation of Derrida they are specters) of gender, she does not do this in order to fix them nor to be rid of them. She engages with both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to locate the inherent ghosts that structure performative acts. These Butlerian spectres are not located outside of the domain of intelligible performatives - they are prohibitions and disavowals that are integral to any coherent repetition. It cannot be said therefore that Butler's work is engaged in a direct way with Derridean mourning; she questions the possibility of knowing whose body it is and indeed her work threatens the safety of dominant notions of "a body". By means of an emphasis on the retroactive positioning of materiality through a reiteration of norms, norms which involve a constituent production of troubling spectres, Butler provides a theory not of the ontological fixity of a body but of the hauntological production of dominant gender ontologies. Taking up her ideas, and developing them to consider the troubling choreographic citations of theatricality and expression, I turn now to investigate the foreclosed attachments of masculine performativity and their restaging in the whirl of spectrality invoked by dance performance.



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<sup>1</sup> As Butler herself characterises it in an interview with Liz Kotz "The Body You Want," in *Artforum International*, New York November 1992 pp 82- 89

<sup>2</sup> Foster's main notions of writing in these texts come from Barthes and Foucault but, I would argue, also make use of Derridean concepts.

<sup>3</sup> Trevor Hope (1998) has argued that Irigaray's notion of the *hommo-sexual*, which Phelan borrows, is dependent upon the positing of a pre-cultural male homosexuality that is forever lost to symbolic representation or rearticulation - it is therefore haunted by the figure of a return of homosexuality as is Phelan's argument here.

## 2. Gender Identification

The previous chapter explored theories of performativity and in particular the notion that the gendered body is performative rather than expressive. I argued that performative acts are not volitional acts, willed by a subject, but rather the means whereby a subject is produced according to the enforced repetition of hegemonic norms. In this chapter I turn to psychoanalysis in order to consider the various constitutive exclusions of masculine norms – performative citations do not simply make gendered bodies appear but also require the disappearance and disavowal of what cannot count as an intelligible gendered body. As Judith Butler has argued, it is not enough to focus on the visible enactment of gender – ‘masculine’ bodies require the loss of other bodies, and it is these that psychoanalysis can address:

The rejection of an expressive model of drag which holds that some exterior truth is exteriorized in performance needs, however, to be referred to a psychoanalytic consideration on the relationship between how gender *appears* and what gender *signifies*. Psychoanalysis insists that the opacity of the unconscious sets limits to the exteriorization of the psyche. It also argues, rightly I think, that what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood through reference to what is barred from the signifier and the domain of cultural legibility. (Butler 1993: 234 emphasis in original)

Psychoanalytic accounts of identification relate both the proscribed losses inherent in subjectivity and the failure of identity to ever fully materialise and they therefore provide an elaboration of the spectrality of performance proposed at the end of the previous chapter. As Butler suggests “identification becomes a magical, a psychic form of preserving the object . . . the lost object continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications” (Butler 1997b : 134). In terms of the works under discussion in the subsequent chapters, psychoanalysis also offers



tools to explore the staging of fantasies and psychoses in the choreographic portrayal of masculinity. The dreams, hallucinations and eventual madness and suicide staged in the narrative of AMP's *Swan Lake*, the compulsive violence and damaging sexuality of de Frutos's work, and the doubling of the split self in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*, all suggest that the choreography itself cites notions of subjectivity drawn from psychological accounts. Although I have argued that performativity is antithetical to notions of 'expression', nevertheless the idea of a psychological 'depth' is reproduced in different ways in these dance pieces and it is psychoanalysis, with its elaboration of the formation of the ego, that provides both the reference for this notion of interiority, and, as I will show, the means to deconstruct it in order to reveal the performativity of identity and desire. In the individual chapters on the pieces I will explore the choreographic deployment of psychoanalytic concepts of idealisation (all three chapters), fetishism (chapter three), castration (chapter four), and the uncanny (chapter five). However here I will discuss the concepts of identification which underpin these discussions and I will outline theories of melancholic incorporation, abjection and hysteria which, I will argue, are common themes throughout these different pieces.

In all the pieces I will discuss, there is a connection between the performance of male homosexual subjectivity and an excessive, unruly and self-destructive body. The three choreographers I examine variously cite images of debasement and inappropriate 'expressivity' as the experience of homosexual desire. Rather than suggest that these choreographers reveal the psychopathology of homosexuality, however, I argue that they stage citations of social and cultural equations between male homosexuality and loss, disease and death. I am not therefore concerned with an analysis (in the clinical sense) of either the choreographers or the dancers but a deconstruction of their portrayal of homosexuality as 'falling ill'. The performativity of masculinity in these works is explicitly concerned with homosexuality as a violent rupture of hegemonic masculine norms and in order to



investigate this further in this chapter I will explore the figuration of homosexuality as a loss which founds the masculine subject. Diana Fuss and Trevor Hope have critiqued the psychoanalytical insistence (in both Freud and Irigaray) on an originary male homosexuality that must be abandoned for a subject to enter cultural life. Judith Butler also takes up this abandonment but poses the question whether this is in fact a performative demand for loss that repeatedly cites a homosexual 'outside' (or 'abject') which, in its inevitable failure, can provide a resource for a reverse-discourse which subverts 'sexual identity' and the definition of homosexuality as always already lost within masculinity.

The main focus of this chapter is therefore on psychoanalytical accounts of identification, invariably described as processes which negotiate, and indeed produce, the relationship of self and other. These processes, proposed in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, are used in various deconstructive ways by Butler, Fuss, Rose, and Silverman among others to enquire into the production of identity as processes involving loss, foreclosure and disavowal. Identity is therefore never self-present, it is always haunted by its constitutive spectres. It is precisely these that reappear in the choreography of Bourne, de Frutos and Anderson, and which I will turn to consider. Firstly I will explore the connections between performative and psychoanalytical accounts of identity and then I proceed to discuss the most common application of psychoanalysis to dance, that of 'gaze theory' from Film Studies. One of the main problems with 'the male gaze' is that it relies upon a separation between identification and desire and it therefore replicates the heterosexual bias of psychoanalytical accounts of gender and identity.

Identificatory processes are neither as rigidly heterosexual as 'the male gaze' suggests nor are they uninhibited and polymorphous – they are predicated upon the internalisation of lost attachments. 'The male gaze' emphasises the spectacle of the visual and, in its focus on what appears, it tends to ignore the disappearances that I have argued constitute performance and the failures of performative gender (it does theorise lack but, as I will argue, this is not to be



conflated with failure). I therefore examine Butler's theories of melancholic incorporation and abjection as two processes that produce 'male' bodies dependent upon the exclusion of homosexuality. Finally I turn to examine hysteria as an interruption of the 'expressive' speaking body or, as Elisabeth Bronfen has characterised it, "a so-called 'disorder' that performs the problematic relationship of identity, gender and representation" (Bronfen 1996: 44). I will argue that a discussion of the various figurations of male homosexual performance as 'hysteria' can illuminate the social and cultural norms concerning masculinity and their potential reworking through a choreographic deployment of hysterical bodies. Hysteria restages the expressive body as a mimetic surface enactment of gender, and the restaging of hysteria, both in the choreographic works under discussion and in my text, foregrounds an excessive embodiment of illness in order to enact disruption and disorder upon the norms which condemn homosexuality as the necessary loss within masculinity.

## 2.1 Performativity and Psychoanalysis

Judith Butler's reformulation of performativity in *Bodies That Matter*, discussed in chapter one, explicitly turns to examine the regulation of subjectivity through identification in order to counter a reading of gender as a volitional performance. She asserts that "the materialization of norms requires those identificatory processes by which norms are assumed or appropriated, and these identifications precede and enable the formation of a subject, but are not, strictly speaking performed by a subject" (1993: 15). Butler's turn to psychoanalysis is motivated by her insistence on the compulsory and regulatory nature of gender but also because it provides an account of the resistance to norms in their incorporation by identificatory processes. Jacqueline Rose has argued that psychoanalysis offers a more complex account of identity than Marxist inflected theories of gender construction precisely because it stresses that identification is incomplete and that



the subject is produced through an iterative process which necessarily fails.

What distinguishes psychoanalysis from sociological accounts of gender...is that whereas for the latter, the internalisation of norms is assumed roughly to work, the basic premise and indeed starting-point of psychoanalysis is that it does not. The unconscious constantly reveals the 'failure' of identity. Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved... 'failure' is something endlessly repeated and relived moment by moment throughout our individual histories...there is a resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life. (Rose 1986: 91)

This passage suggests links with the notions of performativity discussed in the previous chapter; identity is 'endlessly repeated' because it fails to ever fully materialise. Rose's characterisation of identification as failing echoes Austin's suggestion that "infelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir" (Austin 1976: 18) and Derrida's insistence that a performative's risk of failure is "its internal and positive condition of possibility...the very force and law of its emergence" (Derrida 1988: 17). Shoshana Felman suggests a link between performativity and psychoanalysis based in their mutual attention to failure: "referentiality – analytic or performative – can be reached and defined only through the dimension of failure: on the basis of the act of failing" (Felman 1984: 82). Felman's reading of Austin through Moliere's Don Juan in *The Literary Speech Act* (1984) takes the performative 'I promise' to be paradigmatic of all performatives. Saying 'I promise' is itself the act of promising but it also opens up the performative to failure – in order for it to work as a promise, the intention to keep that promise, to follow through and deliver whatever is promised would seem to be necessary – but as Austin himself suggests there are false promises which are still promises (Austin 1976: 11). The promise therefore relies on future events and does not refer to a present but a deferred referent – "constituted by the act of anticipating the act of concluding, the



promise is symptomatic of the noncoincidence of desire with the present” (Felman 1984: 49). Felman asserts that the nonpresence and failure inherent in the promise due to the noncoincidence of any referent can be applied to all performatives – they are all false promises of completeness. Similarly Lacan suggests that the Mirror Stage, through which a subject is formed, holds the promise of unifying the subject, “a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identifications, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of totality” (Lacan 2001: 5). This internalisation of an external image however cannot keep this promise and, as Rose suggests, the identification of the child with the mirror image is a *misrecognition* (*méconnaissance*) “because its apparent smoothness and totality is a myth” (Rose 1986: 53). The performative act defers the referent through promising; psychoanalytic identification promises to complete the lack of the subject but the establishment of the ego ideal defers the possibility of ever assuming the ideal image. In other words, both performativity and identification fail to ever materialise the promise (and are therefore ‘false promises’). This failure is however the very basis of the performativity, the citationality of a promise, as Felman suggests, “if promising consists in the production of an expectation – of meaning?-, the very disappointment of this expectation only perpetuates it, by bringing the acts of commitment back into play” (Felman 1984: 50). Gender identity should therefore be characterised as a promise which can never be kept due to its constitutive failure – a promise which is nevertheless perpetually pursued in an attempt to finally ‘be’ masculine or feminine. Whereas ‘lack’ is usually characterised in psychoanalysis as a negative absence (I consider the notion of castration in chapter four) Felman explores the ‘coincidences’ between Austinian infelicities and Lacanian lack to suggest that performativity posits an inherent failure as a positive opening to difference.



The difference between lack and failure might best be elucidated from Austin's perspective. Austin insists (specifically with respect to the misfire, the act of failing to achieve the act) that the act of failing is not a simple negation, a simple absence of presence (of substance), nor even a simple absence of act... The act of failing thus opens up the space of referentiality – or of impossible reality – not because something is missing, but because something else is done, or because something else is said: the term “misfire” does not refer to an absence, but to the enactment of a difference. (Felman 1984: 84)

If the failures of performativity are neither self-present nor an ‘absence of presence’ then it would seem that the notion of gender identification as a performative promise offers the potential for change. If identification necessarily fails then this is not a condemnation of these failures outside the Law, but necessarily an enactment of difference and an opening up to future refigurations of gender. That the misfire is unintentional, and not the ‘expression’ of an artistic interiority, does not mean that it has no force – as Butler suggests, “the incalculable effects of action are as much a part of their subversive promise as those that we plan in advance” (1993: 241). These failed promises form a main component of my discussions in the later chapters. While Matthew Bourne argues that his choreography focuses on the identification of the Prince with the Swan, I will focus on his failure to secure a masculinity independent of a homosexuality – indeed the Swan holds out a promise of transcendence that ultimately proves deadly within the diegetic depiction of identity. Similarly while de Frutos and members of the dance press focus on the ‘expressive’ autobiographical ‘realism’ of his work, I explore the melodramatic failure of the promise of a narrative of suffering. Lea Anderson's work is taken to task by critics for its failure to express the depth that her quotation of Egon Schiele's Expressionist imagery would seem to promise (although this is not a promise she makes, it is nevertheless cited in her reproduction of hysteric sexuality and deformed, tormented bodies). However, in



attending to the failure of masculinity I do not suggest that this failure is always subversive, since masculinity needs to fail in order to be repeatedly attempted. I will argue therefore that 'masculine' bodies emerge upon the condition of a certain failure – indeed 'masculinity' is the negotiation of a body through ideal imagery that is unapproachable and uninhabitable. Peggy Phelan argues that representation invokes this intrinsic gap in order to keep subjects enthralled to its values, such that "we are kept suspended between the depressing loop of disappointment and the aspiring arc of hope" (Phelan 1993: 172-173). Rather than position performance as outside of representation like Phelan, I argue that performance engages with the disappointment of ideality in various ways that can both reify ideals and subvert their claims to normativity. The idealised body is a performative demand that reifies its own ideality and the impossibility of a final embodiment but, precisely because it has to fail its promise in order to compel repetition, it can result in unfaithful assaults upon hegemonic images.

## 2.2 Gaze Theory

The main psychoanalytical frameworks to have been applied to the interrogation of gendered images in dance performance have been derived from film studies, in particular concepts of the 'male gaze' (see for instance Adair (1992), Cooper Albright (1990), Daly (1992), Manning (1997), Thomas (1996)). According to this concept the male body cannot be looked at without disruption or violence to the image because the spectatorial position is male and heterosexual, and it therefore channels the gaze into an identification with men and pleasure in the objectification of women. Laura Mulvey's seminal article on the cinematic gaze suggest that "according to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification" (Mulvey 1975: 20). Mulvey's analysis is concerned with the Lacanian mirror stage and focuses upon the image as a reflection "that constitutes the matrix of the imaginary,



of recognition/ misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the I of subjectivity . . .it is the birth of the long love affair/despair between image and self-image which has found such intensity of expression in film” (1975: 18).

This love affair/despair is mediated through the gaze which is structured by, and simultaneously structures, a separation between a subject and an object. The gaze gives rise to two pleasures; “the first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen” (ibid). Mulvey argues that women are objectified in cinema to allow scopophilic pleasure and men are positioned so as to allow identification - therefore the classical narrative cinema addresses and thereby positions a male subject. She clearly demarcates the male body as a source of narcissistic pleasure rather than erotic objectification;

A male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. (Mulvey 1975 :20)

Steve Neale further explores the notion of the masculine image as ideal ego in order to modify Mulvey’s claim that the masculine body is not marked for erotic objectification. In ‘Masculinity as Spectacle’ (1983), Neale focuses first on identification, arguing that Mulvey’s account seems overly grounded in sexual difference whereas he argues, “desire itself is mobile, fluid, constantly transgressing identities, positions and roles. Identifications are multiple, fluid, at points even contradictory” (Neale 1983: 4), although he does nevertheless concur that mainstream cinema works to “channel and regulate identification in relation to the orders of gender, sexuality and social identity and authority marking patriarchal society” (1983: 5). This regulation is, he argues, effected through the image of the



ideal ego in the form of the male protagonist of a filmic narrative who is established as displaying the virtues of a paragon of masculinity. It is in itself however a source of anxiety and lack. Neale suggests that the ideality of the male figure can provoke castration anxiety;

The construction of an ideal ego . . . is a process involving profound contradiction. While the ego-ideal may be a 'model' with which the subject identifies and to which it aspires, it may also be source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate. (Neale 1983 : 7)

Neale draws upon Mulvey's delineation of two modes of looking at the female object in cinema in relation to the threat she poses of castration. According to Mulvey, voyeuristic pleasure, "lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (Mulvey 1975: 14) , a process that Mulvey sees as inherent in narrative. By contrast, fetishistic looking is constructed outside of the linear time of the film and is, "a complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (ibid). Neale argues that both processes are also inherent in looking at male figures but whereas Mulvey argues that these processes structure an erotic display of the female body, Neale suggests that other cinematic structures are present in order to disavow any explicit male eroticism since this brings the threat of homosexuality into the line of vision;

The anxious 'aspects' of the look at the male . . .are both embodied and allayed not just by playing out the sadism inherent in voyeurism through scenes of violence and combat, but also by drawing upon the structures of fetishistic looking, by stopping the narrative in order to



recognise the pleasure of display, but displacing it from the male body as such and locating it more generally in the overall components of a highly ritualised scene. (Neale 1983: 12)

Neale's article therefore develops Mulvey's claim that the male body cannot "bear the burden of sexual objectification" by emphasising that the male body is placed for scopophilic pleasure but cannot acknowledge this and instead becomes a site for disavowed homoeroticism. Ian Green's reply to Neale's article highlights this notion of the relocation of eroticism in male spectacle, cautioning against the "tendency recently (*despite* psychoanalysis) to read off the sexual or erotic in films as either 'present' or 'absent'" (Green 1984 :36). Green's main argument questions the notion that cinema rigidly channels identification and suggests that men can and do identify with female characters and are in many cases invited to do so by the structure of the narrative. He also suggests that the pleasures arising from identifications are multiple and not confined to masochism or narcissism. Finally, Green critiques what Neale delineates as 'erotic' - arguing against the assertion that, "the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed" (Neale 1983: 8). Green suggests that what Neale defines as devices to disavow eroticism *are* erotic - in a discussion of the Western he suggests that, "this eroticism is bound up in a heterosexual male scenario whereby mutual gunplay, rivalry, admiration, sartorial elegance are erotic (or can be), not a displacement of it" (Green 1984: 47). Accordingly, it can be argued that the very devices that 'displace' eroticism - "a narrative content marked by sado-masochistic phantasies and scenes" (Neale 1983: 12) - are erotic markers of the male body as, for example, in Jean Genet's film *Un Chant D'Amour* (1950) where violence and imprisonment mark a narrative structure which describes various positions of power within a desiring gaze directed upon male bodies.



If Green's corrections are considered then it becomes evident that Neale's notions of what constitutes the presence or absence of male eroticism are significantly limited by their basis upon a heterosexual division of desire. Whilst it is reasonable to concur with Mulvey's and Neale's claim that the gaze operates to reify heterosexual masculinist representation within mainstream cinema this needs to be modified by an inquiry into how this gaze is structured. Neale's assertion that both Rock Hudson and the male musical star are "feminised" by a desiring gaze suggests that heterosexual desire is a stable and inevitable force.

Although 'gaze theory' has been used to analyse the position of women, particularly in ballet, by theorists such as Christy Adair, Ann Cooper Albright and Ann Daly, Ramsay Burt in *The Male Dancer* (1995) is the only dance theorist to date to consider in any detail the applicability of gaze theory to the analysis of male bodies in dance. Burt traces theories of masculine representation from John Berger and Richard Dyer, together with those of Neale and Mulvey in order to propose "a view of spectatorship in dance based on the gendered nature of the gaze, on identificatory looking and the pleasure of surveying the spectacle" (Burt 1995: 72). He acknowledges the problematics inherent in psychoanalytic accounts of spectatorship in that they, "subordinate cultural and historical spheres to a trans-historical psychoanalytic framework" (1995: 52) but states that nevertheless they offer invaluable tools in understanding the complexities of masculine representation. Burt offers a model based partially on the use of narrative in dance to channel identification and regulate it according to hegemonic heterosexual norms, citing both ballet and early modern choreographers such as Anthony Tudor and Ted Shawn. Burt also suggests various other devices that mark a male body for a male gaze;

In theatre dance, the acceptable male dancer is . . . one who, when looked at by the audience, proves that he measures up to supposedly unproblematic male ideals: he looks actively at his female partner or



upwards in an uplifting way; he appears powerful, uses large, expansive movements: he controls and displays women dancers in duets. (Burt 1995: 73)

Whilst this appears to suggest that a rigid heterosexual economy governs both identification and desire, Burt's subsequent empirical analysis is based in the disruption of the gaze by male dancers and choreographers and is supported by a thorough historicisation of dance spectatorship. The result is that 'the acceptable male dancer' is revealed as a tenuously constructed figure whose co-ordinates shift across the twentieth-century, changing in order to maintain his apparent authority, but he is perpetually undermined and problematised both intentionally through avant-garde strategies but also through the inherent instabilities of the heterosexual claim to mastery of the gaze. Thus Burt relates how Nijinsky's performance offered virtuosic 'masculine' display, often under the guise of 'the exotic', which conformed to nineteenth-century notions of male artistic genius whilst his choreographic work such as *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1912) broke with the conformities of traditional ballet presentation and refigured masculine representation within an early modernist denaturalising and destabilising focus upon sexuality and morality. In a later section, Michael Clark's performances are analysed in terms of the juxtaposition of a subversion of balletic beauty through a homosexual 'degradation' together with a representation of a camp sensibility that is assimilable into dominant discourses on the stability of a hetero/homo distinction. Burt's use of gaze theory therefore attends to the complexities of masculine representation, the coexistence of normalising and subversive images within the same frame and his analysis modifies the frameworks offered by Mulvey and Neale through a contextual discussion of dancing bodies that move in and out of the dominant gaze.

Burt's analysis in *The Male Dancer* nevertheless replicates a division between identification and desire fundamental to Mulvey and Neale's arguments such that



the spectator is invited to identify narcissistically with the male dancer whilst homoeroticism is foreclosed by the structures of dominant representation. In a later article, entitled 'Dissolving in Pleasure: The threat of the queer male dancing body' (2001), Burt reconsiders this division, and the position of spectatorship in relation to eroticised male bodies;

Whereas a traditional model of aesthetic appreciation presupposes a disinterested subject position from which to make aesthetic judgements, visceral responses cause the spectator to become involved in the performance and hence to lose their disinterestedness. Those dances which provoke a visceral response therefore threaten to disrupt the possibility of the spectator taking up this detached, critical position. My pleasure when watching the seductively moving surfaces of queer male dancing bodies, and another spectator's sense of disease or even homophobic panic at queer dancing bodies, imply a problematic blurring of the distinction between subject and object. (Burt 2001: 219)

Burt's argument here therefore is that visceral identification and optical desire are not mutually exclusive but mutually implicated in the act of spectatorship. Burt's methodology is informed by Foucauldian and Deleuzian theory such that he proposes a notion of performance as "a discursive play on and around surfaces, and not . . . an expression of a deep, psychological or existential interiority" (2001: 214). Burt's analysis provides a useful focus upon the politics of the surfaces of the dancing body and his emphasis on transgression and slippage avoid the monolithics of many writings which use 'gaze theory'. His rejection of psychoanalysis however leads him to assert that desire "is based not on lack or loss but on recognition and acknowledgement of sameness, which manifests itself through making connections on the level of the common experience of embodiment" (2001: 222). I turn to consider psychoanalytic accounts of



identification and desire, not in order to locate the 'interiority' of performance, which Burt rightly questions, but to consider how the dance pieces I discuss stage the impossibility of either 'sameness' or common experiences of embodiment. Diana Fuss in *Identification Papers* (1995) focuses upon Freudian accounts of the process of identification, "defined as the internalization of the other" (Fuss 1995: 4) and traces the metaphors and tropes used by Freud throughout his work to explain this process. Fuss's argument concerns the spectres of loss and the constitution of the subject through lack;

Identification. . . invokes phantoms. By incorporating the spectral remains of the dearly departed love-object, the subject vampiristically comes to life. To be open to an identification is to be open to a death encounter, open to the very possibility of communing with the dead.  
(Fuss 1995: 1)

Fuss argues that desire is involved in any identification - the lost object whose spectral remains are incorporated is a desired object. Certain desires and identifications are proscribed, some are prohibited, and indeed, as my discussion of melancholia will demonstrate, some identifications are constitutively foreclosed and disavowed. Loss and lack are foremost in all the pieces I will consider, from the Prince's impossible relationship with the Swan in *Swan Lake*, de Frutos's repeated violent abandonment and *The Featherstonehaughs'* staging of blank surfaces of loss. The spectrality of masculinity in these pieces, its uneasy haunting, means that an application of 'gaze theory' is not altogether useful since, as Green suggests, it tends to "read off the sexual or erotic...as either 'present' or 'absent'" (Green 1984 :36). This opposition is undermined by the various disappearing performative acts in performance and to judge the pieces according to whether they disrupt the 'male gaze' both reifies a notion of a stable heterosexual spectatorial position and ignores those effects of masculinity that are produced as invisible but nevertheless are constituent of its normative appearance.



However this is not to suggest that psychoanalysis is not useful, but the presumption of a heterosexual division between identification and desire needs to be interrogated. I turn now to consider the psychic production of visual ideals and their preservation through melancholic incorporation.

### 2.3 Lost male homosexuality (generous reward offered)

If, as I have argued, 'gaze theory', which derived mainly from Lacanian psychoanalysis, requires a male subject that desires femininity and identifies with masculinity then this opposition can also be found in Freud's writings (which form the starting point of Lacan's theory of the Mirror Stage). Fuss has argued that in several texts Freud attempts to maintain a distinction between desiring and identifying in order to propose the impossibility of homosexuality;

For Freud, desire for one sex is always secured through identification with the other sex; to desire and to identify with the same person at the same time is, in this model, a theoretical impossibility. These two psychical mechanisms, which together form the cornerstone of Freud's theory of sexual identity formation, work in tandem to produce a sexually marked subject. (Fuss 1995: 11)

The heterosexual bias of Freud's writings does not, however, result in Fuss dismissing them entirely. Her analysis is a thorough examination of the politics of identification located at the points where identification and desire are implicated despite Freud's division between them. Fuss identifies three main tropes that are used by Freud as metaphors for the relationship of self and other - falling, consumption and infection. Whereas both falling and being infected are partially figured as feminine identificatory processes, consumption of the other is primarily figured as masculine. Fuss discusses Freud's elaboration of the origins of

patriarchy according to the totem meal in 'Totem and Taboo' (1913), which commemorates the cannibal-parricide of a group of expelled sons that overpower and eat their father but in doing so incorporate him not only into their bodies but into the social structures governing relations of male bodies. Her analysis of this scene is worth citing here in full since the processes outlined will prove important in discussions below;

First, it uncovers the central role of *ambivalence* in identification. The sons hate their father but they also simultaneously love and admire him. Identification travels a double current, allowing for the possibility of multiple and contradictory identifications coexisting in the subject at the same time. What Freudian psychoanalysis understands by "subjectivity" is precisely this struggle to negotiate a constantly changing field of ambivalent identifications: indeed, subjectivity can be most concisely understood as *the history of one's identifications*. Second, the story of the cannibal sons uncovers the *violence* at the heart of identification. All active identifications, including positive ones, are monstrous assassinations: the Other is murdered and orally incorporated before being entombed inside the subject. And finally, identification is an act of *repetition and remembrance*. While the totem meal allows the brothers to expiate the guilty primordial deed, it also repeats the crime once again, permitting them to celebrate their victory over the father and to reappropriate his powers. Identification is only ever partially secure and never complete. The whole unconscious process functions as a form of psychical memorialisation in which the subject must repeatedly kill and ingest what it wishes to preserve a remainder of inside. (Fuss 1995: 34 emphasis in original)

In Fuss's figuration of subjectivity as the history of identifications - an incomplete history which is never only in the past and has never simply 'taken place' but which



is constantly invoked in a memorial practice of revisitation - has sympathies with Rose's argument that identification necessarily fails. For Fuss *ambivalence*, *violence* and *repetition / remembrance* become the key features of any identification and as I will argue these are also the key features of the masculinity cited in the dance works under discussion. Ambivalence, violence and repetition/remembrance are explicitly linked by Freud with homosexuality - he suggests that the brothers were united by a homosexual bond - and Fuss therefore argues that in locating, "the origin of culture in the *repression* of homosexuality...Freud's stories of oral incorporation are never just about eating" (Fuss 1995: 36). Trevor Hope has also analysed the totem meal, together with a passage from Freud's 'Civilisation and Its Discontents', to deconstruct Freud's "insistence on uncovering male homosexuality at what it imagined to be quite literally the 'origin' of sociality" (Hope 1994: 171). Hope suggests that Freud's totem meal (and by extension his theories of subjectivity) produces homosexuality as a necessary absence.

Male homosexuality is produced as that which must be uncovered as always already archaic, only able to be discovered belatedly, never actualized within a historical or narrative present. Male homosexuality, indeed, becomes the archaic entity that psychoanalysis will ritually unveil, but in so doing always construct as nonpresent. (Hope 1994: 175)

Masculine identification can therefore be figured as haunted by this constituent nonpresent originary homosexuality. If, as both Fuss and Hope suggest, 'masculine' subjectivity can only be accounted for by Freud with recourse to a lost origin in homosexuality then it is founded in loss and structured by the ambivalence, violence and remembrance of identification. The point of both Fuss and Hope's arguments is to critique this loss of homosexuality in Freud – and indeed his association of it with a pre-cultural savagery – as placing male



homosexuality as an impossible identification. The reward for its non-presence is no less than the entrance into culture, making homosexuality a compulsory loss which is both outside of culture and inaccessible to a subject except as neurosis. It is precisely this disavowal of homosexuality that informs Judith Butler's notion of performative gender, discussed in my previous chapter. However Butler's use of Freudian notions of identification is not a reification of the impossibility of homosexuality but a deconstruction of the possibility of heterosexual normativity. For Butler, identification is a form of subjection which engages disavowed homosexuality but does not condemn it to a pure absence. Her deployment of the Freudian notion of 'melancholic incorporation' is particularly 'hauntological', in the Derridean sense explored in the previous chapter, in that it stages an enquiry into the discursive production of gender and its constituent ghosts but does not attempt to exorcise hegemonic norms of their troubling spectres.

## 2.4 Melancholia

In 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917) Freud suggests that the pathological condition of melancholia is, like mourning, "the reaction to the loss of a loved object" (*P.F.L.*, 11: 253)<sup>1</sup> but the difference lies in the patient's consciousness of the loss – whereas mourning involves the acknowledgement of a loss, melancholia is "in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" (*P.F.L.*, 11: 254). Both processes involve an identification with the lost object – what Freud terms "internal work" (*ibid.*) – but in melancholia this internalisation results in a significant change in the ego.

In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he



reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished.  
(*P.F.L.*, 11: 254)

The end result of this process of self-debasement is suicidal despair; “an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life” (ibid.). Freud argues that rather than judge the accuracy of the self-description of the melancholic, attention should be drawn to how this vilification describes a psychic process of identification based in loss. Freud suggests that the self-criticism displayed by the patient represents a splitting of the ego “one part of the ego sets itself over and against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object” (*P.F.L.*, 11: 256). This establishment of a critical agency within the ego is later taken up by Freud in his formulation of the ‘super-ego’ but in this essay he states that it is the ‘conscience’ which enacts this debasement of the ego. The reproach directed at the ego is however, according to Freud, a modification of accusations which “fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love” (*P.F.L.*, 11: 257). The ego has then adopted the characterisations of this lost love and it rails against itself.

An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a *real slight or disappointment* coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different...it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a



cleavage between the critical activity and the ego as altered by identification. (*P.F.L.*, 11: 258 emphasis in original)

In a later essay, 'The Ego and the Id' (1923) Freud returns to consider the notion of the ego altered through identification with a lost object. In his consideration of melancholic identification he returns to the notion of the incorporation of a desired object. Although, as Fuss argues, Freud is keen to separate the processes of identification from desire in an adult he does state that during an early developmental stage, the 'oral phase', the ego's relationship to an object is a combination of *both* desire and incorporation. According to Freud's 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), the subject goes through an oral, anal and finally genital phase – the first has correspondences with the totem meal discussed above in that it involves a cannibalism of the loved object; 'the sexual aim consists in the *incorporation* of the object – the prototype of a process which, in the form of identification, is later to play such an important psychological part" (*P.F.L.*, 7: 117 emphasis in original). Freud suggests that the mechanism of melancholia is a return to the oral phase – i.e. the object is both desired and identified with in the process of melancholic incorporation. Freud however qualifies this in his later essay when he argues that this is a feature of all identifications; when "a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of the ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego, as it occurs in melancholia" (*P.F.L.*, 11: 368). This setting up of the object inside the ego leads to the formation of the critical agency that, in 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud titled 'conscience', and here he calls the super-ego. As I will further elaborate in the next chapter, with reference to the idealised figure of the Swan in Bourne's *Swan Lake*, the super-ego judges the ego against the internalised loved object and inevitably finds it wanting. As I have suggested above, the ego-ideal is also invoked in the Lacanian mirror phase in that the child desires and incorporates the misrecognised perfection of the image; a promise of perfection to which it is never adequate.



The desired object that is set up as the ego-ideal is, according to Freud, an identification that helps resolve the Oedipal complex and hence it is integral to the assumption of a gendered position within a heterosexual framework of desire. Thus Freud suggests that the boy's primary desire for the mother is also identificatory (following the oral eroticism of breastfeeding) but this is challenged by the father whose authority and desire intervenes in the boy's desire for the mother. Freud argues that a 'normal' resolution is the preservation of the desire for the mother through its displacement onto other females enacted through an identification with the desiring position of the father. Freud argues however that these identifications are not along the lines of melancholic incorporation except in rare cases where the boy internalises his attachment to his mother by becoming feminine. What Freud does not consider within the discussion of the identificatory processes of gender is the possibility of homosexual desire of the boy to the father (the girl does desire the mother initially – and it is this which, according to Freud, makes her assumption of femininity more convoluted and ambivalent). He does propose an original bisexuality but here the desire for the father in the boy comes from a feminine identification, and the girl's desire for the mother from a masculine identification – both desire and identification are therefore always strictly speaking heterosexual.

Butler proposes a reading of Freud's texts in *Gender Trouble*, in which she argues that the assumption of gender can be considered in terms of a melancholic incorporation of homosexuality. If, as Freud contends, "the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and. . . it contains the history of those object choices" (*P.F.L.*, 11: 368) then, Butler argues, the gender of the ego is formed through lost gender attachments. She reads this against Freud's account of how a boy must lose his mother as an object of desire by suggesting that in order to enter the Oedipal scene and submit to heterosexual gender consolidation, the father must have already been lost and installed as a figure of punishment. The



prohibition on homosexual object choices structures identification and results in the formation of the ego along the lines of compulsory heterosexuality. Butler argues that it is not however that there is first a “boy” who desires his “father” but rather these subject positions emerge and are maintained through the taboo against same-sexed desire; “if the melancholic answer to the loss of the same-sexed object is to incorporate and, indeed, *to become* that object through the construction of the ego-ideal, then gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity” (Butler 1990b: 63).

Butler extends the notion of ‘identity’ to include the body and contends that the gendered body becomes bounded according to this logic of prohibition. Taking Freud’s assertion that, “The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego: it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (*P.F.L.*, 11: 364), Butler develops the idea of bodies as psychic morphologies;

Psychic projection confers boundaries and, hence, unity on the body, so that the very contours of the body are sites that vacillate between the psychic and the material. Bodily contours and morphology are not merely implicated in an irreducible tension between the psychic and the material but *are* that tension. (Butler 1993: 66)

The contours of the body are therefore coexistent with the ego and ‘materiality’ is marked by what it has lost - a masculine body therefore restages the loss of other bodies and incorporates these losses as a means of securing its coherence;

As an anti metaphorical activity, incorporation *literalises* the loss *on* or *in* the body and so appears as the facticity of the body, the means by which the body comes to bear “sex” as its literal truth. The localisation and/or prohibition of pleasures and desires in given



“erotogenic” zones is precisely the kind of gender-differentiating melancholy that suffuses the body’s surface. (Butler 1990b : 68)

Masculine bodies are therefore masculine inasmuch as they disavow a love of men as well as repudiate a feminine identification. The surfaces of the body and the stylisation of this body in performative acts are grounded in refused attachments and the success of the repetition of norms is dependent upon the extent to which the masculine body both produces these losses and refuses to acknowledge them. Whereas in *Gender Trouble*, Butler’s reformulation of melancholy emphasises the performative production of gender through loss, in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997b) her emphasis shifts to the ambiguity of the location of the lost homosexual attachment. Butler argues that the process of melancholic incorporation does not necessarily mean that attachments have been made and then lost but that certain attachments are produced and maintained only as a prohibited loss;

If the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of this accomplishment as mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, *preempting* the possibility of homosexual attachment, a foreclosure which produces a domain of homosexuality as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss. (Butler 1997b :135)

Heterosexual masculinity does not involve a refusal of homosexuality identification but *is* an identification with refused homosexuality. This difference is all important - if heterosexuality was structured through a refusal to identify with homosexuality then a simple binary relation would exist in which homosexuality became the outside of intelligible genders. Any reappearance of the lost attachment would therefore appear on the outside of the coherent subject and not threaten with any



force the continuity of the hegemonic norm. Butler contends that the stylised acts that produce masculinity do so because they comply with an *internalised attachment* to other male bodies - "The straight man *becomes* (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he "never" loved and "never" grieved" (Butler 1997b: 147 emphasis in original). This never-never attachment reproduces the ungrievable loss of homosexuality as constituent of coherent genders not as an outside but a troubling identification, something akin to a "haunting";

That refusal to desire, that sacrifice of desire under the force of prohibition, will incorporate homosexuality as an identification with masculinity. But this masculinity will be haunted by the love it cannot grieve. (Butler 1997b: 137-138)

In *Excitable Speech* (1997a), Butler reads other texts of Freud's in order to elaborate how certain psychoanalytic accounts of gender and identity require that homosexuality be perpetually deferred. Butler's concern in this text is why the declaration of homosexuality in the military should be read as a performative act, and what structures the reception of that act as "contagious". Freud's argument in 'On The Mechanism of Paranoia' (1911) is deconstructed by Butler as one concerning the maintenance of masculinity through the paranoid deflection of homosexuality. Again however she emphasises how masculinity is dependent upon this homosexuality and actively produces it as a deferred presence.

It is not simply that homosexuality must remain unacted and deflected such that man in his self-preserving and proper sense may live, but that the very notion of the "ego-ideal" - the imaginary measure by which citizenship is psychically regulated - is itself composed of this unacted and deflected homosexuality. (Butler 1997a: 120)



Citizenship is constituted through a turning of homosexual desire upon itself to establish the ego-ideal as a berating bearer of guilt. Sociality requires this turning and therefore results in the relationships between heterosexual men being grounded in homosexuality as Butler suggest with regards to the military;

This paradox was articulated perhaps most obviously in the claim that social cohesion in the military requires the prohibition on homosexuality, where that cohesion was then described as a magical *je ne sais quoi* that kept military men glued together. The formulation might read: *we must not have our homosexuality in order to have our homosexuality : please take it / don't take it away from us.* (1997a : 110 emphasis in original)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has written on the “homosocial” bonds between men which involves an “always-already crossed line” (1985:89) between social bonding and homosexual desire. Butler’s analysis would suggest that rather than there being a line or boundary as such there is an incorporated prohibition against homosexuality which results in the desire being replayed in the figure of prohibition, “a routing of desire against desire, such that the prohibition becomes the site and satisfaction of desire” (1997b: 110). The place, or location, of homosexuality is therefore ambiguous in that it persists *through* disavowal not despite it and is preserved as the foundation of heterosexual masculine subjectivity not outside of it. This ambiguity gives the melancholic specter its force - it haunts from the position of being always lost and yet always returning to police that loss. The haunting figure of homosexuality must have the potential to appear, it must be figured as a repeatable loss, yet the threat of this repetition is that it may not be lost, it may eventually materialize. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore always concerned with the deferment of the materialisation of homosexuality, even as it is itself a materialisation of incorporated lost homosexuality.



## 2.5 Abjection

If, as discussed above, Freud's concept of the bodily ego and Butler's formulation of gender melancholia describe a body delineated according to a heterosexual binary logic then it is at the boundaries of this body where the regulation of norms occurs. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler draws upon the work of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva in order to theorise the boundary between "inside" and "outside". The notion of "sex" as an iteration, a performative command, means that it is never completely materialised but is repeated and this repetition produces the appearance of a solid ground but only does so by reciting and regulating what is considered 'inside' and 'outside' of the body. Therefore although the intelligibility of a body is determined by a heterosexual gender system, indeed the body is the materialisation of that system, what remains unintelligible threatens to rupture the "sex" of the body.

The naturalised notion of "the body" is itself a consequence of taboos that render the body discrete by virtue of its stable boundaries. . . [these] presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions and erotic possibilities. The deregulation of such exchanges accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all. (Butler 1990b: 132 - 133)

Mary Douglas offers an examination of bodily margins in *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas's formulation of body pollution suggests that matter leaking from, or smeared onto, a body has the potential to threaten the dissolution of the perimeters that divide it off as discrete because the boundary between what constitutes the individual and what is outside of it are blurred. Both the matter and the orifices or bodily zones concerned on the one hand are culturally marked as polluted and



defiled but on the other are also simultaneously invested with the power to disrupt and open up the body. Douglas suggests that, "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Douglas 1966: 115). Through a synecdochal slide therefore, bodies can become the body of discourses that construct them and circulate through them, giving messy bodies the potential to open up the discursive practises which have produced a contained masculinity. Douglas further notes that "any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind" (1966: 121).

Julia Kristeva (1982) draws on Douglas's work in order to formulate notions of abjection - the expulsion of objects that, in being expelled, constitute the subject. As with Douglas this is a bodily action that is simultaneously a cultural, and (for Kristeva but not Douglas) a psychic act - "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself" (Kristeva 1982:3). Kristeva expands from uncleanliness into, "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982: 4). Therefore what defiles bodies and opens them up is not just, and never only, bodily matter (in the form of excretion etc.) but what questions the materiality of bodies, what blurs the borders.

Since the boundary of the skin develops through a heterosexual tracing of erotogenic zones (through homosexual melancholia) homoeroticism presents just this sort of disruption that Kristeva denotes as abjection. This is a haunting that engages the threat of homosexuality, not through representation but rather through the disrespect of, and intrusion across, the bodily borders. If the masculine body requires a coherent boundary, indeed *is* in part the recitation of a coherent boundary then anything which interrupts this has the potential to confuse 'inside' and 'outside'. Butler suggests that, "anal and oral sex among men clearly



establishes certain kinds of body permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order” (Butler 1990b: 132) - anything which refigures masculine bodily boundaries can carry the disruptive force of a “penetration” which is counter to the notion of masculinity as penetrating, phallic, and self-contained. As I will elaborate in chapters four and five, this kind of abjection is deployed by Javier de Frutos in *Grass* (1997) where anal and oral sex is depicted as ‘bloodying’ the male body and leading ultimately to death, and in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* where sex is presented as an excessive and disruptive performance.

The return of the abject is not however necessarily invoked in the crossing of boundaries nor does it result entirely in the dissolution of the hegemonic order. George Bataille has argued that all eroticism involves the breach of borders. In *Eroticism*, he suggests that transgression is at the heart of the erotic. Indeed pleasure involves a crossing of the borders of subjectivity and Bataille links this with the notion of “*discontinuous* beings” (Bataille 1986: 12).

Eroticism opens the way to death. Death opens the way to the denial of our individual lives. Without doing violence to our inner selves, are we able to bear a negation that carries us to the farthest bounds of possibility? (Bataille 1986: 24)

Kristeva also acknowledges that abjection is fundamental to a certain sort of deadly pleasure - “The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment where revelation bursts forth. Jouissance in short” (Kristeva 1982 : 9). An overlap can then be suggested between the abject and the erotic in that both are intrinsically bound to a questioning of the sovereign subject. A complicity emerges therefore between boundaries and pleasures. Bataille notes that erotic pleasure is structured by taboos and limits that are paradoxically maintained through their transgression. Foucault, commenting on



Bataille's delineation of transgression, suggests that a reinstatement of a boundary occurs simultaneous to its trespass. Indeed it is the trespass that gives the boundary its shape and structure:

The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess : a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable, and reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. (Foucault 1977: 34)

Or as Bataille suggests *"the transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends and completes it"* (1986: 63, emphasis in original). In the analysis of bodies therefore it is not enough to valorise "homoeroticism" (even if it were possible to identify what, in practise, that means) since although it crosses boundaries and signals the return of the abject it also reinstates heterosexuality as an organising principle of the surface of the body. The nature of performativity is that it is not simply a set of acts that affirm "sex" but also an excluded "outside" that constantly transgresses materiality *and* is also the occasion for its reiteration. If the analysis of dancing masculine bodies is to focus on the surface significations of these bodies then the dynamics of transgression need to be considered to acknowledge the complexity of any "subversive" bodily act. Simple oppositions to gendered norms are in a sense already a part of those norms - their appearance is in part stabilising to the very ideas of "sex" that they challenge. However, as Foucault suggests, the act of transgression reveals its contingency in that it invokes the boundaries and exposes what it is that constitutes the intelligible inside of these limits;

Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being: transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes. (Foucault 1977 :34)



The messy, erotic, abject spectre is threatening therefore not only because it offers a rearticulation of the bodily boundary but because through that rearticulation it exposes how the body is constructed through abjection. The spectre is a repeat, a revisiting of the masculine body in a move that deconstructs the abject's ontological position as an "outside". Masculine bodies are therefore never completely discrete but always already awaiting the ghost of disruption, the promise of pleasure and the return of the abject. The return of the abject however has implications across the coherence of corporeal boundaries in that it contaminates the internalised psychic construction of the body. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler develops the notion of abjection in relation to identificatory processes - the means whereby the "internal" life of a subject is constructed and policed;

The forming of a subject requires an identification with the normative phantasm of "sex", and this identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge. This is a repudiation which creates the valence of "abjection" and its status for the subject as a threatening spectre . . . [which should not be figured as] a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility. (1993: 3)

Butler discusses how the banished abject spectre is "produced as a troubling return" (1993: 23) at the centre of all regulatory mechanisms of "sex". She reads Lacan's texts on the symbolic constitution of the sexed subject as performative - that is, concerning a law that maintains its status as The Law only through its repeated citation. She contends that the assumption of a sex requires abject figures of punishment - "the feminized 'fag' and the phallicized 'dyke'" (1993: 103),



but suggests that “these are spectres produced by that symbolic as its threatening outside to safeguard its continuing hegemony” (1993: 104). Heterosexual masculine identification can therefore be figured as structured through double abjection - the “feminine” and the “fag”<sup>2</sup> – and these two spectres offer a conflated and confused threat (to be a feminine man is to be a fag, to be a fag is to be feminine). The avowing of a feminine fagginess in the form of a coherent and stable gay identity is therefore a threat but one that continues to situate itself as outside of hegemonic masculinity, indeed it is a position that is available through abjection and therefore confirms its situation outside (and in turn will be constituted through a disavowal of heterosexuality). I will discuss this complexity in relation to de Frutos’s deployment of a camp effeminacy. For Butler the threat of the returned abject is not simply due to the appearance of these figures “outside” of the hegemonic subject but rather from the resulting failure to maintain the logic of inside and outside. Since this logic is performatively constituted it has a failure implicit in its temporal contingency - it needs to be recited and this recitation is propelled by a desire to conceal the abjection that compels it.

What this means at the level of the analysis of dancing masculine bodies is that their masculinity is secured *and* unfastened through repetition that requires failure and the potential return of the abject. The spectre of the feminine fag therefore hovers implacably at the site of the masculine and the gendered stylisation of the body should in part be considered as the attempt to ward off the manifestation of this troubling return. In Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake* the figure of the ballerina, usurped by the casting of Adam Cooper as the Swan, is an example of such a return – the Swan’s ‘masculinity’ requires that she is prevented from appearing but, as I will show in the next chapter, the piece is nevertheless haunted by the effeminacy she represents. The boundaries of hegemonic masculinity are secured by projecting the troubling femininity and homosexuality into the figure of the fag. This however involves an identification *with* the figure and the repeated return so that it can be dispelled, akin to Derrida’s formulation of exorcism which “pretends to



declare the death in order to put to death” (1994: 48). Exorcism can be read in this instance as an attempt to settle a ghost in a (foreign) body in order to be rid of its disruptive haunting of the self-present body through the announcement of its demise elsewhere;

It is in fact [en effet] a matter of a performative that seeks to reassure itself by assuring itself, for nothing is less sure, that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead. It speaks in the name of life, it claims to know what that is . . . In short, it is often a matter of pretending to certify death there where the death certificate is still the performative of an act of war or the impotent gesticulation, the restless dream, of an execution. (Derrida 1994: 48)

This exorcised figure offers insights into how and why representations of abject bodies are often deathly - this is due to a death wish because what they threaten to bring is death to the coherent, continuous hegemonic subject. In locating the dead outside of hegemonic norms, the appearance of an eternal and inevitable gendered structure of bodies is maintained. Heterosexual masculinity buries its history along with the dead fag but this threatens to rise again in a vampiric undead attack on the hegemonic claim to transcendental truth and nature.

## 2.6 Hysteria

So far I have discussed identification in terms of loss, both melancholic and abject, and I have suggested that homosexuality is a necessary loss in the production and maintenance of heterosexual masculine norms. That this loss is not a pure absence, or an originary lack, but a performative demand means that ‘masculinity’ cites homosexuality as an absence but, in doing so, produces it as a necessary exclusion which is played out on the surface of male bodies. In short,



homosexuality becomes a spectre which haunts the very coherence that its exclusion is supposed to insure. In order to further consider the relationship between these spectral losses and bodily performance I turn now to consider the performativity at the 'origin' of psychoanalysis – that of hysterical bodies – and propose that theories of hysterical identification and performance offer frameworks for thinking performativity with psychoanalysis in a way that both sets up an 'expressive' body and problematises its reliance on interior truth and a gendered relationship to 'sex' and sexuality. I will make connections between the excessive bodily discourse of hysteria and the iterative structure of performativity, suggesting that both defer the bodily referent and make promises which prove to be scandalous.

The performances of hysteria staged by Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière in Paris commanded large audiences, drawn to his displays of women in the thrall of hysteric states. Freud spent six months with Charcot from 1885-1886 and ten years later, with Josef Breuer, published *Studies on Hysteria* which explored the case histories and symptoms of this spectacular disorder. In chapter five I will discuss Michel Foucault's (1976) argument that the hysterization of women's bodies during the late Victorian period was an effort to get them to tell the inner 'truth' about sexuality and in doing so produced sexuality as an object of study for the emerging practice of psychoanalysis. The hysterical woman revealed through her actions (or was analysed to uncover) some hidden essence of her feminine sexuality. This was therefore a discursive production of what Butler names the inner/outer distinction which rendered gender performance as expressive of a prediscursive essence concerning sex. As I will argue below, the hysteric body does not however speak through its presence, nor through its absence but across this divide – it therefore offers a connection between psychoanalysis and the disappearing acts of performance elaborated in the previous chapter.



In my application of hysteria to the analysis of 'masculine' performance I am seemingly performing something of a catachresis, in that in classical Greece it was linked explicitly to uterine disorders and even in the Salpêtrière and in Freud's later practice the male patients were far less numerous and spectacular, and therefore achieved less fame, than those such as Augustine, Anna O. and Dora. Indeed the particular identifications that Freud locates in hysteria are defined as 'feminine' symptoms of expressivity, irrationality, deceitfulness and seduction. When a woman was diagnosed or cast as hysteric then she was in some ways conforming to the production of her 'sex' as always already abject and unruly and although male hysterics were diagnosed and treated it was precisely their 'masculinity' that was brought into question by the condition. Within film studies Barbara Creed and Lynne Kirby have analysed masculinity in terms of hysteria but in doing so they have still used the term to denote a kind of feminine excess which therefore enacts "a disturbance of gender" (Creed 1991: 133). In the application of hysteria to 'male' bodies therefore I hope to cause some gender trouble by discussing masculinity as a spectacular illness which engages 'femininity' as an awkward performative. Male hysteria inevitably raises the spectre of homosexuality, figured as a failure of masculinity and a disease of the 'male' body.

When men with hysterical symptoms are emotional or theatrical, psychiatrists hint that they must be homosexual. Freud argued that hysterical men were sexually passive. Wilhelm Reich described the male hysteric as characterized by "feminine facial expression and feminine behavior." Even the feminist historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has written, "It is a truism that hysteria in males is found most frequently among homosexuals." (Showalter 1997: 76)

The dance pieces I explore repeatedly cite this connection between a pathological male homosexuality and an excessive femininity, and the works depict homosexual desire as a result of, or resulting in, the subject 'falling ill'. This descent into illness



results in the hysterical fragmentation of the coherent body because the subject, through identification, only comes into being through the unification of the body by incorporating normative ideals. The refusal, or failure, to submit to the narrative of sexual identity results in the excess of bodily signification played out in hysterical performance but also the potential death-dealing shattering of the subject.

Whereas Bourne's *Swan Lake* can be read according to this aetiology of homosexuality (his Prince commits suicide whilst fantasising being torn apart by swan-like masculine ideals) the pieces by both de Frutos and Anderson do not simply offer a reification of a 'normal' or 'healthy' male body against the ill homosexual. Instead these pieces cite hysterical excess to deconstruct the gendered discourses of truth, expression and 'normality'. Hysterical bodies need not always affirm their status as already pathological but can occupy the fragmentary excess of hysteria in order to turn its shattering force onto the ideals which would condemn them to failure, illness and, ultimately, death.

The notion of the insurrectionary force of hysteria has been articulated within feminist discourse since the early part of the twentieth century as a way of negotiating the Freudian figuration of femininity as an excess. Freud's theories of hysteria establish 'femininity' as a problem of interpretation, and this is a problem that occupies the rest of his work. Consequently, hysteria has been taken up in various ways by feminist psychoanalysts as offering the disturbance of a masculine symbolic – the so-called 'French Feminist' trio of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva all deploy the figure of the hysterical woman as a potentially disruptive force. Drawing on Irigarayan and Kristevan hysteria, Elin Diamond proposes that the notion of the feminine as outside of, indeed disruptive to, patriarchal language has given hysteria a privileged place within feminist politics.

Hysteria...has become the trope par excellence for the ruination of truth making. Whether we situate the hysteric empirically, as a historico-medical object, whose unreadable symptoms derive in part from the material and



gender constraints of bourgeois life (particularly, as Breuer noted, the Victorian tendency to channel young women into jobs as governesses or nurses to the dying), or discursively, as a 'speaking body' that defies the grammar of the patriarchal symbolic, hysteria in feminist discourse has become meaningful precisely as a disruption of traditional epistemological methods of seeing/knowing. (Diamond 1997: 5)

The 'feminine' emerges in psychoanalysis in a troubling relationship between the body, desire and truth and this has given it an ambivalent position within feminist criticism – it seems to reduce women to a body, and an ill body at that, but the notion of disruption and revolt played out across this body has for many scholars offered a promise of resistance. As Julia Borossa notes, "hysteria picks up on a problematic, paradoxical relationship to conformity, played out primarily in the arena of the body: gendered, out of control and refusing an easy categorisation" (2001: 7). Elaine Showalter's *Hystories* (1997) offers a history (or 'hystory' as she phrases it) of the discursive deployment of hysteria, focusing on the shifts from the neurological practice in the late nineteenth century of Charcot at the Salpêtrière, through Freud's development of psychological accounts of hysterical trauma through to current notions of psychosomatic illness and mass syndromes. Showalter notes that many feminist artists and performers have turned to examine the iconography of the hysteric body and she cites the work of Mary Kelly, Anna Furse and Dianne Hunter as drawing on the famous case studies of hysteric women patients in order to "reappropriate the histrionic, aesthetic and choreographic elements of hysteria" (Showalter 1997: 105). (As I will demonstrate in chapter five, Lea Anderson, via Egon Schiele, makes reference to the photographs of the Salpêtrière patients and similarly reappropriates the aesthetic and choreographic force of hysteria in her staging of histrionic male bodies.) Rebecca Schneider proposes that hysteria is also deployed by female performance artists such as Karen Finlay and Lydia Lunch as a disruptive restaging of explicit 'femininity' and indeed an engagement of the abjection of feminine bodies.



Though the condition of hysteria is no longer recognized by the medical profession as viable, contemporary performers and theorists continue to wrestle with the conditions which gave rise to hysterical effects – conditions which have not necessarily disappeared. Indeed, hysteria is often played back with a vengeance in arenas of feminist performance – or at least in critical analysis. (Schneider 1997: 115-116)

This connection between hysteria and theatricality is however not new - Elin Diamond has argued that hysteria and melodramatic theatre of the late nineteenth century shared a common physical vocabulary and Freud himself makes a connection between the fits of his patients and the acting of Sarah Bernhardt. This link between excessive theatre and hysteria, and the problem with both, is staged through the excessive expression of the body.

Typical of melodrama – and hysteria – actions are writ large: the hysteric chokes, she writhes on the ground, she pulls out handfuls of hair, her back is arched, her limbs contracted, her face twitching. In full melodramatic expressiveness the body speaks. But what does it say? (Diamond 1997: 9-10)

It was the unintelligible speech of the hysterical body that produced a demand for narrative. Diamond suggests that the turn to realism in theatre mirrored the emerging practice of psychoanalysis in that both sought to make this excessive body speak in ways that are coherent through a reading of the body as narrative of an internal state. Jacqueline Rose asserts that whereas Charcot wanted to find the physical source of hysteria, in his stimulation of hysterogenic zones, Freud attempts to make the body communicate, “he made of hysteria a language (made it speak) but one whose relation to the body was decentered, since if the body spoke it was precisely because there was something called the unconscious that could



not” (Rose 1986: 38). In the excessive speech of the hysteric body Freud therefore discerns something invisible, a psychological interiority that ‘expresses’ itself through the body; hysteria lies at the root of the development of psychoanalysis itself.

It was only by penetrating behind the visible symptoms of disorder and asking what it was the symptom was trying to say, that Freud could uncover those unconscious desires and motives which he went on to expose in the slips, dreams and jokes of individuals paraded as normal. Thus the challenge to the entity ‘hysteria’, that is, to hysteria as an entity available for quite specific forms of social control, relied on the concept of the unconscious...Hence Freud’s challenge to the visible, to the empirically self evident, to the ‘blindness of the seeing eye’. (Rose 1986: 97)

This reading of the body to find its hidden desires however is not a simple affair and the hysteric often refused to yield her secrets. As Diamond above notes, hysteria disrupted “traditional epistemological methods of seeing/knowing” (op.cit.). Both Charcot and Freud sought to distinguish between truth and falsity in the performances of the patients - and this lead to distinctions between real symptoms and a theatrical artifice. Similar to Austin’s repudiation of theatrical parasites, Charcot’s mistrust of some of the theatrical excesses of his patients lead to charges of ‘malingering’; “Malingering as a diagnosis or category tended to confuse two separate issues: that of the genuineness of the symptoms and that of the falsity of the patient’s utterances” (Borossa 2001: 27). Whereas Charcot sought to find the physical evidence to either prove or disprove the deception of the utterance, Freud proposed that the bodies performed for him were in some ways necessarily theatrical since they were restagings of other bodies and not simply the authentic actions of an individual. This notion of the hysteric’s adoption of the physical traits of others was eventually to lead to his development of ideas of identification but with hysteria Freud talks of ‘conversion’, in that desires and



repressions were translated into physical movements. The physical utterance was necessarily deceptive therefore since it was not expressing things that the patient could not acknowledge since they were foreclosed as the contingent losses of the body's emergence.

In these attempts to define the body that is at stake in hysteria, the reference to language makes it clear that the physiological body is not what is involved, even though the symptoms in question are not to be identified exclusively with discourse either. Instead, what is played out in the body takes the place of a discourse that cannot be uttered. (David-Ménard 1989: 3)

Freud nevertheless set about translating the unutterable discourse of the body into a narrative of identifications. Monique David-Ménard has traced this complex relationship between the body and discourse in psychoanalytical descriptions of hysteria and she asserts that the hysterical body is ambiguous because the body has to occupy various roles – physical and psychological – in an interplay of readable symptoms and invisible referents. She argues that the “difficulty of conceptualising the body's status in hysteria arises because in reality its physiological aspect is not separated from its symbolic value” (David-Ménard 1989: 21). Hysteria therefore seems to foreground the materiality of the body, and in this excessive presence of the performing body the sign seemingly collapses into the referent. However Freud suggests that hysteria stages a particular relationship between the body and its signification – in response to the question as to whether hysteria is physical or psychical he answers;

As far as I can see, every hysterical symptom involves the participation of *both* sides. It cannot occur without the presence of a certain degree of *somatic compliance* offered by some normal or pathological process or connected with one of the bodily organs. And it cannot occur more than



once – and the capacity for repeating itself is one of the characteristics of a hysterical symptom – unless it has a psychical significance, a *meaning*. The hysterical symptom does not carry this meaning with it, but the meaning is lent to it, soldered to it, as it were; and in every instance the meaning can be a different one, according to the nature of the suppressed thoughts which are struggling for expression. (*P.F.L.* 8: 72-73 emphasis in original)

Freud's interest is in this repetitive meaning, rather than in the symptoms per se, and he reads the body *through* its actions in order to find another body – the erotogenic body or the bodily ego. This is the body that the hysteric experiences and it is formed through identifications with others; it is both formative of the patient's experience of a physiological body but also deferred through their actions. The hysteric's symptoms (which are necessarily repeatable, as Freud maintains) are therefore performances of other bodies which have been incorporated. As Peggy Phelan has suggested "Hysteria, at least in the original and defining case of Anna O., involves the use of the patient's body as a stage for the body of the other" (Phelan 1996: 97). The hysterical body doesn't, and indeed cannot, speak of these other bodies and yet constantly restages them – Freud argues that it is in fact the loss of the erotogenic body that produces the hysterical body, or as David-Menard phrases it, "The hysteric has no body, for something in the history of her body could not be formulated, except in symptoms" (1989: 66). It is here where a connection with melancholia can be made since, as Butler argues, melancholia is a process of incorporation which erotically suffuses the surface of the body as a method of preserving lost others and disavowing their loss. Both Freudian hysteria and a Butlerian reading of melancholia suggest that the body is gendered by what remains unperformable – "In opposition to a conception of sexuality which is said to "express" a gender, gender itself is here understood to be composed of precisely what remains inarticulate in sexuality" (Butler 1997b: 140). Both Freud and Butler are therefore suggesting that the stylisations of the body (the acts, gestures and enactments of performative gender) always emerge in relation to other bodies



whose loss cannot be avowed. Both melancholia and hysteria are enactments of refused identifications whose spectral remains suffuse the surface of the body and indeed Butler suggests that gender can be read as a symptom – “an identification has been made and disavowed, whose symptomatic appearance is the insistence, the overdetermination of the identification that is, as it were, worn on the body that shows” (Butler 1997b: 149).

The choreographic movement of the body, whether hysteric or melancholic, is always a negotiation of what cannot appear, what must be lost. However whereas melancholia loses homosexuality in order to ‘express’ gender, hysteria loses the normative heterosexual coherence of the gendered body. Melancholic incorporation is a foreclosure of homosexual attachments in order to produce a bounded body (where the borders are composed precisely by this disavowed desire) but hysteria is an irruption of the body which disrupts its integrity, as Rose proposes, “Normal sexuality is... strictly an *ordering*, one which the hysteric refuses (falls ill)” (Rose 1986: 51). Hysteria could therefore be considered as a refusal of the symbolisation of gender and sexuality, indeed a resistance to melancholia. Butler argues that melancholia and hence gender is sustained through a refusal to redirect the self-berating force of the super-ego against the ideals which cannot be desired and are therefore ‘lost’ - “If I acquire my gender by repudiating my love for one of my own gender, then that repudiation lives on in the acting out of my gender and asks to be read as rivalry, aggression, idealization and melancholia” (Butler 1997b: 162). Although Butler doesn’t consider the disruptive potential of hysterical excess, can hysteria be considered as a physical enactment of the aggression that condemns the ego to foreclose objects of desire and which perpetuates the pursuit of an ideal gender?

What are the affirmative consequences of acting out as it works, within a psychoanalytic frame, to theatricalize that aggression without ethical consequence, and to articulate, for the purposes of self-reflection, through a



set of “acts” the logic of repudiation by which they are motivated? Isn’t it then the case that such theatricality might work as a psychoanalytic notion and not only that which must be corrected or tempered by psychoanalysis? (Butler 1997b: 163)

Does hysteria offer this theatrical ‘acting-out’ which both employs psychoanalysis and resists the oedipal demands for gender coherence? Elin Diamond has proposed a feminist theatrical practice of mimesis which is based in readings of hysteria. Both Irigaray and Kristeva have suggested that the hysteric’s body communicates in a language outside of the Symbolic order, a feminine discourse that marks a return to the maternal body before the subject became differentiated through lack. Diamond uses an Irigarayan notion of subversive mimetic repetition and the Kristevan notion of the ‘*vreal*’ or true-real which poses the signifier as referent.

While Irigarayan mimicry dismantles the Truth (patriarchal mimesis) through endless repetitions and reflections, the hysteric’s true-real dismantles Truth by referring to yet refusing to symbolize its meaning...we might imagine a mimesis that is undermined (or overcharged) through repetition, or a stable referentiality troubled by the body’s true-real...in the theater the same play (and the “Same” theory) can be played not only again but differently. (Diamond 1993: 379)

Rose has argued however that both Irigaray’s and Kristeva’s figurations of hysteria attempt to reclaim a material and maternal body which is necessarily subversive but somehow not part of representation. “What seems to happen is that the desire to validate the preoedipal instance as resistance to the oedipal structure itself leads to a ‘materialization’ of the *bodily* relation that underpins it, so that the body of the mother, or more properly the girl’s relation to it, is based as being somehow outside repression” (Rose 1986: 36 emphasis in original). The problem for Rose is that this



attempt to return to a preoedipal feminine doesn't account for the repression of 'femininity' and it attempts to disavow the failures of identity ever to be realised. Similarly Butler (1993) has examined Irigaray's 'Plato's Hystera' (1985) and Kristeva's accounts of the chora in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) to critique the notion of 'femininity' as pre- or extra-discursive materiality. Butler suggests that Kristeva collapses femininity and the prediscursive but Irigaray ambiguously mimes the text of Plato to explore the production of the feminine as outside representation. Butler argues that Irigaray therefore invites the question: to what extent is the proscription of a prediscursive maternal body a *performative* externalisation of the 'feminine'?

Rebecca Schneider has engaged with hysteria to pose similar questions. She argues that Diamond's formulation of hysterical mimesis suggests a reflexive and strategic citation of the material feminine not a return to an 'authentic' female body. This is useful when examining feminist performance art which seems to present the female body as the 'real' thing or as the referent which subverts representation. Schneider's point is that a theatrical deployment of hysteria can unfaithfully replicate the reduction of femininity to the irrational body and in doing so comment upon the production of gendered bodies according to notions of expressive reality.

With an emphasis on an explicitly hysterical realism, versus an implicitly realistic hysteria, a performer's body would, like a hysteric's, speak its historical signification and reflexively or ironically re-perform its symptomatology. The trick is that in so speaking her symptomatology within the explicit frame of performance (that is, explicitly showing the show), the performer would simultaneously have to escape the very signification her body speaks – the performer would have to comment on that hysteria at the same time that she exhibits it. (Schneider 1997: 116)

The risk that female performers have to negotiate when performing hysterically is



that it will be read as expressive of their 'femaleness' rather than a hyperbolic stylisation which reveals both their body and sex to be performative citations. In applying theories of hysteria to male performers I therefore take the risk of reifying the figuration of the male homosexual body as naturally expressive of a feminine condition, thereby reproducing the representation of homosexuality as a pathological disorder of masculinity. However, like Schneider, I argue that this is a risk worth taking since hysteria offers a consideration of the excessive body in performance as a performative which can be used to disrupt the very exclusions which insist on loss of homosexuality in the production of a coherent masculine body. The reappearance of the abject melancholic spectre through a choreographic resignification of hysteria can disrupt both the 'femininity' that it refers to and the 'male' bodies that it is played out across.

Schneider's distinction between hysterical realism and realistic hysteria is played out in various ways in the pieces I discuss. In chapter four I argue that the notion of 'realism' is ambivalently evoked by the choreographic melodrama of Javier de Frutos. In chapter five I suggest that Anderson both exhibits hysteria and comments upon it in the mimetic chain of her choreography which replicates Egon Schiele's replication of replications of hysterical symptoms. In the next chapter, however, I will suggest that AMP's *Swan Lake* doesn't escape the hysterical signification it sets in motion. Matthew Bourne's presentation of the Prince's symptomatology attempts to locate a homosexual hysteria in a narrative which seems to offer some critique of the homophobic conditions of its emergence. Ultimately, however, the choreography restricts the potential disturbance of the hysterical effects through an emphasis on diegetic closure and the disavowal of failure through a fetishised idealisation of masculinity. Whereas de Frutos and Anderson seem to negotiate the hysterical body with the self-reflection and subversive potential that Schneider is arguing for, Bourne presents hysteria as the psychopathology of a repressed gay individual rather than a performative enactment of the demand to exclude the spectre of effeminate homosexuality.



Hysteria is therefore ambivalent – it deploys the violence, repetition and remembrance of identification and does not offer a pure site ‘outside’ of the conventions it repeats. As an excessive spectacle of the ‘material’ body it also creates a stage for the performances of the spectres which constitutes its very materiality. Choreographing hysterical masculinity is a risk which negotiates the false promise of gender and the collapse of femininity, male homosexuality and illness. In its unruly reanimation of the ghosts of dead identifications, hysteria offers a performative invocation of the exclusions of heterosexual masculinity and also a restaging of the expressive body as revealing not its inner truth but the processes of its manifestation.

## 2.7 Conclusions

Just as gender, according to both psychoanalysis and performative theory, is a promise that cannot be kept, the expressive hysterical body promises to reveal its maladies and the ‘truth’ behind its theatrical repetitions, but necessarily ruins the distinctions of inside and outside, absence and presence and, ultimately, also fails to keep its promise. The figure of hysteria that I propose is a nexus for convoluted invocations of expression, realism, depth, citation and choreography. In the previous chapter I explored the various disappearing bodies of performative choreography and in this chapter I have investigated the constitutive losses of masculine identity; hysteria, as an excessive embodiment of lost other bodies, provides a concept for writing these losses together as productive, and potentially disruptive of, dancing male bodies. Peggy Phelan argues that dance is like psychoanalysis in that it attempts to control and regulate the unruly body, to bring the hysteric into a coherent temporal order.



The body is always a disciplined entity; one part of its disciplinary training is temporal-linguistic; another part is temporal-physical. Psychoanalysis pursued developing the talking cure as a performative speech act whose utterances transformed the body. (Just as the linguistic performative joins the statement to the action, “I promise,” the talking cure sought to join the body itself to historical order.) From a system of disarticulated limbs, contractures, and paresthetic seizures, psychoanalysis sought to reproduce a free-moving, coherent, vital body...Psychoanalysis and choreography are two different modes of performing the body’s movement. Each seeks to give the body a system of time. (Phelan 1996: 94)

Phelan’s discussion of dance focuses on the construction of feminine perfection in Balanchine’s ballerinas and the denial of history in the performance of ‘the now’ in dance. Whereas I agree with Phelan’s critique of ballet, the examples I turn to explore in the following chapters complicate the association of choreography with narrative closure and indeed they explicitly explore the notions of reconstruction, repetition and the history of identifications. All the pieces I discuss cite a hysterical body without, necessarily, choreographing it into a disciplined order. Even Bourne’s *Swan Lake*, which, I will argue, does deploy a conventional narrative in order to contain the hysteria it sets in motion, nevertheless fails to keep this promise, as the many discursive reassertions of the absence of homosexuality in the piece reinvoke it as a troubling spectre. De Frutos and Anderson restage the “disarticulated limbs, contractures and paresthetic seizures” of hysteria without the reestablishment of order or coherence – indeed both suggest ‘narratives’ and both use hysterical repetition to undo them. History – personal and cultural, of bodies and art – is cited in these works, and in my text, precisely in order to both acknowledge the reproduction of conventional depictions of failed masculinity and to open them up to future reworkings, not to close them down as either authentic or inevitable.



The figure of hysteria is circulated and reworked in various ways therefore, through the dancing bodies, which restage homosexual masculine subjectivity through the ambivalence, violence and remembrance which proscribe it as a foreclosed identification. I propose that hysteria can be employed hauntologically in that it does not reveal the origin, or originality, of the subject but invokes the disavowed spectres of its production, revealing the foreclosed history of masculine norms and the performative citational processes which demand certain losses and failures. An emphasis on the theatricality of choreographic citation resists the naturalisation of the playing out of abject, melancholic male homosexuality as 'expressive' of the reality of homosexual subjectivity. The choreography of hysteria nevertheless risks a collapse into narratives of expression and authenticity, as I explore in chapter four, but, I argue it is never fully complicit in these reductive readings since its excessive repetition foregrounds a performative reanimation of loss. The expressive body, through hysterical choreography is therefore potentially radically refigured as revealing the production of interiority, rather than directly communicating this interior psychological and emotional landscape. It is this potential that I turn to investigate in the following chapters, exploring the complex restagings of masculine norms and disruptive homosexual spectres.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Freud are taken from the *Penguin Freud Library* trans. James Strachey eds. Angela Richards and Albert Dixon London: Penguin 1991 – the reference includes the volume and page number

<sup>2</sup> The phallicized dyke is also a threat to masculinity but does not form the focus of this study



### 3. AMP's Swan Lake – Feathered Fetishism

In her *Notes on Camp*, Susan Sontag places *Swan Lake* (she doesn't specify *which* version) as a privileged part of the canon of camp (Sontag 1967: 277). Almost thirty years later, in 1995, Matthew Bourne staged a contemporary dance version of the ballet with a male dancer in the Swan Queen role, opposite a male Prince and therefore seemingly referred directly to an inherent campness and, despite Sontag's efforts to separate camp and homosexuality<sup>1</sup>, to the link between excessive performance and a gay practice of reading. Esther Newton argues that "incongruity is the subject matter of camp, theatricality its style, and humor its strategy" (Newton 1979: 103), but whilst these are all present in Bourne's *Swan Lake*, it also details a tragic story of impossible desire and a fatal flight into illness. Sontag proposes that "Camp and tragedy are antitheses. There is seriousness in Camp (seriousness in the degree of the artist's involvement) and, often, pathos... But there is never, never tragedy" (1967: 287). This chapter will investigate Matthew Bourne's production of *Swan Lake* in terms of a tragedy that is directly related to a repudiation of homosexuality, camp and effeminacy in the projection of a masculine presence. The 'never-never' relation of camp and tragedy is therefore reproduced in the never-never incorporation of lost homosexuality into melancholic masculinity but I will discuss whether the piece offers potential as a cultural text which can acknowledge this loss. I also explore, however, how it invokes certain fetishes in an attempt to preserve the very masculine ideals which proscribe homosexuality as that which must be expelled from masculinity. Press articles and interviews with Bourne and Adam Cooper, the principal dancer in the piece, propose a division between identification and desire in the pervasive assertion that the main duets between two men are concerned with a desire for one to be like the other rather than a desire of one for the other. The choreography does not, however, sustain this division and I posit that the piece in fact stages a collapse of the distinction between a desiring and an



identificatory relation to masculine ideals. The expulsion of homosexuality by both choreographer and performer is therefore never successful and in fact is constitutive of the fetishised male bodies that Bourne presents. I will examine articles and reviews in the dance press and a critical essay by Susan Leigh Foster (2001) in order to demonstrate how the piece is generally discussed in terms of this absent homosexuality which nevertheless threatens to return.

In the previous chapter, Judith Butler's notion of gender formation as a melancholic structure was discussed in terms of the incorporation of lost homosexual attachments to produce masculine bodies. In *The Psychic Life of Power* Butler suggests that the prohibition on homosexual attachments results in a disavowal of such attachments through their preservation as the stylised acts that are the performative reiteration of masculine bodily norms. This chapter will enquire how this concept can be used to consider the fatalism of Bourne's representation of homosexual identification and how male homosexuality is presented as incommensurable with dominant norms of masculinity and is therefore doomed. The cultural death of homosexuality is, however, a performative which needs to be repeated and can therefore be recited in ways that expose and critique the melancholic production of discrete, autonomous male bodies. The chapter will consider whether Bourne's choreography offers this kind of unfaithful repetition of fatal homosexual love. It will also consider how the disavowed loss that constitutes gender identification is intrinsically involved in the production of images and ideals of masculinity, with reference to Freud's paper "Fetishism" (1927) and recent feminist readings of his work by Kaja Silverman (1992) and Laura Mulvey (1996). I suggest that Matthew Bourne's choreography both narrates the haunting of masculinity and yet is in turn haunted by the losses it cannot acknowledge in its production of fetishised male bodies.



### 3.1 The piece

*Swan Lake* is perhaps the most famous balletic work but, as Selma Jeanne Cohen (1982) has argued, there is no opportunity to see an 'original' production since the history of the ballet is one of reinvention and reworking. Giannandrea Poesio (1995) suggests that the poor reception of a ballet called *Swan Lake* on 4th March, 1877 choreographed by Julius Reisinger to a score by Tchaikovsky, could have resulted in the ballet disappearing altogether, but it underwent severe cuts and changes and several restagings to be presented most successfully in 1895 by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov. Rupert Christiansen suggests that although Petipa and Ivanov are credited with the role of the 'original' choreographers of most versions in ballet companies' repertoires today so many different choreographers have subsequently altered *Swan Lake* that, "the result is as bastard a text as any other you might see" (Christiansen 1996:29). Matthew Bourne states that a version which most influenced him was choreographed by Peter Darrell in 1979 for Scottish Ballet which used the 1877 version of the Tchaikovsky score but which stages the White Act (Act II where the swans appear) as an opium-induced hallucination. Bourne also cites Mats Ek's *Swan Lake* (1987) for the Cullberg Ballet as an influential version which introduces contemporary movement rather than pure traditional ballet in order to stage an Oedipal psycho-drama, with bald-headed swans and a feminist Odette/Odile, although Bourne states "his is a little too radical for me" (Macauley 1999:206).

Bourne's *Swan Lake*<sup>2</sup> uses the 1877 score, with a few alterations, and his work resembles the traditional, if not 'original', versions in that there is a story of forbidden love, split over four acts. Where it differs is in the gender of the two protagonists – he replaces the classical heterosexual couple with two men. The role of the Swan/the Stranger, danced by Adam Cooper, a principal from the Royal Ballet, replaces the standard practise of using the Prima Ballerina in the swan



queen Odette/Odile role. The role of Prince Siegfried, shortened to the Prince, is danced in this version by Scott Ambler, a long term AMP company member. This casting caused a stir in the British dance press over the possibility of a male-male, and therefore homoerotic, Swan and Prince pas-de-deux. Although AMP's *Swan Lake* was something of a break with tradition in these alterations to the principal roles, in many other aspects, Bourne followed conventional stagings of the ballet. Unlike either Javier de Frutos or Lea Anderson, Bourne does not deploy a fragmentary or disruptive use of expression – he uses mimetic gestures and stereotypical movement in order to present characters and to establish and develop their relationships within a linear narrative. In interviews he has repeatedly stated his interest in traditional notions of storytelling and in conventional methods of acting and in *Swan Lake* this conservative theatricality is evident. The dancers often use a stylised mime or exaggerated gestural language in order to propel the plot but whereas traditional romantic ballet separates this mime from the danced solos and pas de deux, interspersing virtuosic divertissement with storytelling, Bourne integrates them so that the characters are recognisable from their individual vocabulary and performance styles and their emotions are 'expressed' through this idiosyncratic whole-body movement not just through gestures.

Bourne's choreographic style therefore has more in common with Modern dance than with the classical canon from Petipa or Ivanov, and it draws on the expressive character-driven performances of American choreographers such as Graham and Humphrey but which are also found in British balletic work of Ashton, Macmillan and Tudor. Bourne's traditional approach to representation and character is matched by Lez Brotherston's designs which are also conventionally theatrical in that the set depicts stylised royal locations such as the interiors of a palace or St James' Park for the White Act. The vague 1960's styles of the costumes, mixed with a few anachronistic touches like mobile phones, add a nostalgic feel to the piece and they function to further describe the role of the characters – for example the American Girlfriend's inappropriateness is accented through her cheap and



trashy puffball skirt, the Stranger's black leather look accents his sexualised dangerousness . In place of the tutus or tulle skirts and pointe shoes of a female corps de ballet, Brotherston designed breeches for the swans in Acts II and IV. They cover the legs from a corset-like waistband to just below the knee and their shaggy material suggests feathers. The naked torsos are dusted with white make-up and the hair is whitened with a black forelock which extends in a stripe down the forehead to suggest a beak.

A detailed narrative of the piece has been recounted in many articles and reviews<sup>3</sup> but as many of its plot and character developments are unimportant to the discussion in this chapter I will concentrate instead on the figures of the Prince and the Swan. The prologue sees the Young Prince, clutching a swan stuffed toy, lying asleep in a large bed, tossing and turning as if suffering from a nightmare. A semi-naked man in feathered breeches appears in the window behind the bed, as he flexes his arms above his head the prince's motions become more violent until he sits up with a start. Now awake, the Swan from the Prince's vision has disappeared and his mother, the Queen, enters his bedroom. She has a reserved, stiff bearing and she repeatedly flinches away from the Prince, communicating an inability or unwillingness to express affection towards her son. The Prince responds with gestures of longing, outstretched arms which are shaken off or refused by the Queen. This short section establishes a relationship of refused love and stifled emotion between mother and son and it introduces the characteristic movement vocabularies of both figures that are used throughout the piece. Act I continues this sense of awkwardness and repression as the prince is shown going through the rituals of royal engagements and he further incites his mother's disapproval when he cowers from the flashbulbs of the paparazzi. During the rituals the boy playing the Young Prince is replaced by Scott Ambler, as the adult Prince, but although he has aged the repetition of the cowering scene and his mother's continuing disapproving coldness suggests that his childish inadequacies still haunt him. Back in the Prince's bedroom, following a disastrous visit to a



theatre where the royal party watch a pastiche of a romantic ballet, the Prince gazes with despondency at his own image in a mirror. His mother enters and again he reaches out to her but she shrugs him off brusquely. The refusal of the Queen to console her son for his failures or weaknesses develops into a duet where the Prince reaches and clasps the Queen desperately and she struggles and rebels against the inappropriateness of his affection - although Bourne's choreography does not describe a relationship as classically Oedipal as Ek it nevertheless does suggest the son's unfulfilled desire for his mother's attention and love.

The Prince leaves the palace and is thrown out of a nightclub after getting drunk and picking a fight with a sailor who has put his arm around him. He dances a solo of hunched awkward turns and curtailed reaches, "swimming arms that clutch for an absent partner" (Jays 1996: 353) and at the end of the sequence the gauze front of the club dissolves to reveal a vision of a flock of swan-men. Ambler reaches out, as if to touch his vision and then runs offstage. The score moves into Act II and the setting changes to St James' Park, where the Prince enters and hurriedly writes a note – his crumpled bodily composure and manic urgency suggest that he is about to commit suicide and he advances towards a lake presumably to end his life in the company of the swans who have occupied his mind since childhood. Adam Cooper as the Swan enters, the vision of the Prince's boyish dreams, followed by a company of fourteen men all dressed in the swan breeches. The White Act that follows is the least narrative of Bourne's piece, and, as in many other versions of *Swan Lake*, it is dominated by solos, duets, pas de quatre and group choreography<sup>4</sup>. It is here that Ambler and Cooper first dance together, as the gawky contractions of the Prince give way to the powerful sweeps and jumps of the Swan. The Prince follows the Swan's lead and they often mirror each other or dance in unison. There are also sections of weight sharing leans and lifts and although Cooper's arms are always held extended wing-like in these encounters and rather than embrace the Prince he nuzzles his head into Ambler's



chest or places it delicately on his shoulder. These duets are punctuated by group choreography where the swans together perform the idealised bodily dynamics of the Prince's dreams. Susan Foster found their performance "magical, menacing, seductive, enthralling" (2001: 148) and she offers a description of their movement that echoes the rapture of the Prince at the sight and physical flow of their energetic male bodies;

With languorous sinuosity a wavelike impulse crosses their bodies, only to explode into sharp shifts of posture and weight. At the moment of fullest extension the rib cage will jut out, a leg pull in, unsettling their bodies' vulnerable openness. Then they dart, then gallumph, then balance delicately, and, with intricate precision, swivel into a new pathway, gathering a new momentum. (Foster 2001: 190)

The shift in the Prince's vocabulary to approximate this more expansive and direct style leads him at the end of the act to run jubilantly across the stage and to tear up the suicide note. This happiness doesn't last for long however. Act III takes place at a royal gala and Ambler and Cooper again dance together but this time Cooper is in the role of the Stranger, the Odile/Black Swan of the libretto. In terms of the plot he is the son of the Press Secretary, drafted in to seduce the Queen but also to tip the Prince into madness because of his similarity to the Swan (how either the Press Secretary or the Stranger know about the Swan isn't clear). If the purpose of Cooper's performance in the previous act was to appear as a seductive and consoling ideal vision of a Swan, then in this act he performs a series of aggressively heterosexual solos and duets to appear as a threatening vision of hegemonic masculine norms. Dressed in black leather trousers, boots and coat, and brandishing a riding crop, he dances with the Queen and the Princesses with a very clear division between his active desire and control and their passive submission. The Prince and the Stranger take part in a court dance but although they dance with female partners they stare at each other throughout and exchange



the women between them. This is not homosexual seduction however but homosocial competition and when the dance finishes they are left facing each other in a stand-off. The Queen enters and the Stranger continues his seduction of her but halfway through the stage light switches into the blue wash of Act II and a solo violin picks up a variation of the Swan's theme. The Prince replaces the Queen in the Stranger's arms and Cooper and Ambler dance a duet resembling an awkward tango with their bodies held stiff and apart not sinuously draped around each other as in the Stranger's duets with women. Cooper breaks off into a solo during which poses of the Swan are alluded to but then whipped away at the last moment and his fast, aggressive and sharp style taunts the Prince instead of offering affection or comfort. A sequence of leaning and holding from Act II is repeated but the Stranger twists the Prince's arm behind his back rather than cradling him with outstretched arms. His cruel resemblance to the Prince's ideal is sealed when he smears some cigarette ash in a line down his forehead, mimicking the stripe of the swans.

The Prince's response is to perform awkward, angular spasmodic movement – a hysterical vocabulary which suggests a mental breakdown. The act finishes in violence as the Prince tries to separate his mother and the Stranger but is beaten and pistol whipped then dragged off stage. In Act IV he is again in his bedroom, restlessly turning about in bed. As in the Prologue, the Queen enters and again she does not respond to the Prince's reaching arms. The twitching psychosis of the Prince grows and the domineering mother figure is replicated by several women wearing Queen masks who, in an inversion of the pampering rituals of Act I, hold him down and administer pharmaceuticals. As the Prince lies sedated the swans reappear around the bed but they flock menacingly around the prone figure as if to continue the vengeance wrought by the court and the doctors. The intervention of the Swan momentarily rescues him from their flapping 'wings' and pecking 'beaks' but the couple cannot survive their onslaught long and they are separated before being seemingly destroyed in a flurry of thrashing arms and



kicks; the powerful dynamics of the swans' masculine performance has cruelly turned to crush any hope that the Prince and the Swan could survive. The final image is of the Queen rushing in to find the Prince lying face down on the bed, supposedly dead by his own hands, whilst the Swan cradles the young Prince in his arms at the window behind the bed. The terrifying premonition of the Prologue has come true in that the Prince's attachment to the Swan has brought about his violent condemnation by both the court and the swan-men and has lead to his self-destruction. Jann Parry suggests that the "message is an alarming one: deviate from the norm, in the animal or human kingdom, and you will be terminated with extreme prejudice" (1995:13).

Despite this tragic ending, or indeed, I will argue because of it, Bourne's *Swan Lake* has enjoyed enormous success both financially and critically and has garnered many awards on both sides of the Atlantic. AMP, prior to *Swan Lake*, was a small scale touring company with modest success and funding. This piece received unprecedented press coverage for a contemporary dance company, due in no small way to the casting of several Royal Ballet dancers in principal roles and to the frisson of homophobia elicited by the prospect of male duets. AMP is now a big business, with several international tours including America, Australia and Japan and a website that boasts a range of merchandise emblazoned with images of the male swans. After a run which broke the records previously held by the Ballets Russes, *Swan Lake* has had repeated returns to the West End and has been filmed and broadcast on primetime national television and is sold commercially in video format. Bourne's eroticised masculine spectacle is very much a sexualised commodity that can circulate on various commercial levels - it can appeal to West End tourist audiences, go for "the pink pound" through Bourne's promotions in the gay press and at events such as Stonewall Charity Galas or it can be seen as straight and a suitable topic for study on A-level syllabuses, promoted with a special educational pack.



The hugely successful British film *Billy Elliot*, (2000, directed by Stephen Daldry) concludes with a scene of Adam Cooper, as the adult Billy, dressed as the Swan waiting in the wings to go on stage for Act II. Becoming a dancer was Billy's dream of escape and, unlike the Prince, he is shown to succeed in achieving his ideal. Like the Prince's fight with a sailor in the nightclub, Billy gets into a fight with a boy who makes a gesture of affection towards him. However, *Billy Elliot* leaves the sexuality of its protagonist vaguely ambiguous - homosexuality is explicitly represented in the extravagantly camp cross-dressing schoolfriend but there are scenes of tenderness and recognition between them, and even a kiss (even if it is to say goodbye!). Unlike Billy, the Swan is discussed by all critics and by Bourne himself as unproblematically straight and masculine, and they often collapse Adam Cooper and the role he plays into one heteronormative figure. The image of the Swan has thus been mythologised as a symbol of heterosexual idealism and through its many different manifestations it has almost become a recognisable icon of inspirational masculine dancing. On the strength of this Bourne has presented a documentary, *Bourne to Dance*, exploring men dancing, aired on Christmas Day 2001 to a huge audience, in which *Swan Lake* was given a pivotal role in changing attitudes towards dancing and masculinity.

### 3.2 Fetishism

Although this chapter therefore participates in this discursive expansion of *Swan Lake* I want to investigate not only how the choreography and the promotion of the piece ensures that the fetishised male body of the Swan can succeed in becoming a marketable phenomenon but also how it is haunted continually by the spectre of its disintegration. The piece does not exploit the inherent misfires of performative gender but forwards a concept of identity as 'expressive', based in a use of movement to communicate an interior psychological state. This is especially pronounced for the character of the Prince, whose movements are awkward and



introverted, with stiff limbs and faltering steps or desperate reaching arms which encircle the empty space of his mother's refused embraces. This expressivity escalates in Act Three where the Prince is rejected by the Stranger and he falls twitching and shaking to the floor – the video augments this with images of paranoia as the Queen, the Stranger and the guests at the ball leer mockingly over his collapsed body. This leads into the final act where the Prince shakes, jerks and contorts in a fit before being administered sedatives and electro-convulsive therapy by a hallucinatory swarm of clones of his mother. The Prince is therefore shown to fall ill, and eventually die, as a result of unliveable desires whose repression eventually fragments his body, as he fantasies being torn apart by masculine ideals. Bourne uses hysterical choreography to detail the experience of repressed homosexuality and the choreographic convulsions of a disordered body are explicitly located within a narrative which details how the Young Prince's fear of public exposure and lack of maternal love are repeatedly enacted in the adult body of the Prince, whose uncontrolled spasms play out past traumas and refused losses.

In the previous chapter I discussed Schneider's distinction between "an explicitly hysterical realism, versus an implicitly realistic hysteria" (Schneider 1997: 116), and I suggested that hysterical realism was a citation of the expressive body which could reveal the performativity of gendered interiority. Bourne's narrative-driven choreography is however, as I will argue below, far closer to realistic hysteria and it therefore repeats the attempts of both realist theatre and psychoanalysis to explain, pathologise and (in the case of the latter) cure the diseased mind and impose a temporal discipline on the hysterically excessive body. As I will demonstrate however, this ordering of the body fails in Bourne's choreography because the suicidal death in the epilogue of the piece can not erase the anxiety over homosexuality which continues to haunt the piece as a neurosis. The 'illness' of homosexuality spreads virally to infect the critical discourses surrounding the piece, as demonstrated by the repetitive, almost hysterical, assertions by Bourne



and the press concerning the heterosexuality of the male-male duet. Whilst the dancing bodies on stage are tied into an etiological narrative, the wider textual body of the piece multiplies the homosexual dis-ease so that the unruly irruption of a masculine disorder is finally not contained.

It could be argued that Bourne is illuminating the effects of homophobia through his explanation of hysteria, and there is certainly some ambiguity in reading this piece in relation to mourning. The piece is dedicated to Simon Murphy, a former AMP member who died from AIDS related illness, and the tragedy of the piece could work as an allegory to mourn the losses from the AIDS epidemic. It is also possible to read against the authorial voices of Bourne, Cooper et al. in order to perceive the piece in part as a celebration of gay desire in the face of the violence of societal disapproval. I explore however whether it is precisely the choreographic insistence on a 'realistic' (or at least logical) hysterical body rather than a hysterical disruption of the 'realness' of gender, which contributes to the tragedy of the trajectory of his plot. Bourne's conventional use of movement to express the 'interior' life of a character promotes a conservative conception of gender identity based in the visible 'presence' of a gendered core, structured through necessary absences. These absent bodies are however constitutive of the culturally proscribed mandate on homosexual identification which does not abolish homosexuality as such but rather repeatedly announces its fatality. As Butler asserts, the melancholic incorporation of homosexuality into masculine performativity does not result in the vanishing of homosexuality but its persistence from beyond the grave;

This is not a buried identification that is left behind in a forgotten past but an identification that must be levelled and buried again and again, the compulsive repudiation by which the subject incessantly sustains his/her boundary. (Butler 1993 : 114)



*Swan Lake* is populated by repudiated figures who do not disappear from either the piece or the discursive context of the work but are constantly invoked in order to be exorcised. 'Femininity' and 'homosexuality' are zealously expelled from the stage but both the choreography and the extra-diegetic discourses of the piece repeatedly level and bury these identifications, forever wary of their return. I want to argue that this anxious necromancy relies on an idealised 'masculinity' which operates in relation to both Freudian and Marxist logics of the fetish. Freud's essay, 'Fetishism' (1927) establishes a highly contentious theory in which a male child creates a substitute for his mother's penis so that he can disavow his perception of her lack. Kaja Silverman argues however that castration is a projection of masculine lack, not a property of women;

[W]omen's anatomical "wound" is the product of an externalising displacement of masculine insufficiency, which is then biologically naturalised, the castration against which the male subject protects himself through disavowal and fetishism must be primarily his own. (Silverman 1992 :46)

According to Silverman the fetish does not therefore replace the mothers 'lost' penis but protects against the awareness that heterosexual masculinity is maintained by projecting any incoherence, discontinuity or lack onto femininity. Fetishism is therefore a protection against the return of this lack from the figure of castrated femininity. But what is this 'lack' within masculinity and why should it become conflated with femininity? Freud, inadvertently, gives some insight into this compounding of loss in the following passage:

It [the fetish] also saves the fetishist from becoming a homosexual, by endowing women with the characteristic that makes them tolerable as sexual objects... Probably no male human is spared the fright of castration at the sight of the female genital. Why some people become homosexual as a



consequence of that impression, while others fend it off by creating a fetish, and the great majority surmount it, we are frankly unable to explain. (*P.F.L.* 7: 353-354)

Although Freud is unable to explain the reasoning behind these mechanisms of denied knowledge he proposes a collapse of homosexuality into fetishism (since both operate to disavow castration) but he also suggests that homosexuality is something which is experienced as a lack or loss which in turn needs to be protected against, or fended off. If this is reread through Silverman's corrective to Freud's biological essentialism then the fetish is seen to be a complex response to masculine lack in that it fends off both 'femininity' and male homosexuality. Silverman concurs with Freud's argument that homosexuality has a fetishistic function that disavows castration<sup>5</sup>, but if homosexuality is a protection against lack then why would it also need to be disavowed? Why would a man need to be 'saved' from becoming a homosexual – unless this homosexuality, like the lack projected onto women, is always already a constitutive loss within heterosexuality. I want to argue that the particular emphasis on a masculine presence in *Swan Lake* reveals that femininity and homosexuality are mutually abjected as the lack at the heart of normative masculinity. The complex interrelation between these two losses is revealed in the formula which suggests that to desire men is to be like a woman and therefore a failed or lacking man. Heterosexual masculinity therefore performs the work of a fetish, according to this logic, to both surmount 'feminine castration' and to 'save' a man from homosexuality. Femininity and effeminate homosexuality are 'lost' yet surround and infiltrate AMP's *Swan Lake* in multiple ways due to the choreographic and discursive fetishism of masculine bodies which attempt to ward off the many ghosts that haunt the site of normative gender performance.



### 3.2a The Swan versus the Ballerina

Perhaps the first ghost of AMP's *Swan Lake* is that of the usurped ballerina. The role of Odette and Odile is classically taken by a prima ballerina and, as perhaps one of the most famous ballets, *Swan Lake* has become popularly identified with the epitome of feminine balletic grace. The problematic depiction of women within the various "originals" has however been discussed by writers such as Adair who argues that "the virginal Odette and the whorish Odile are the essence of ballet. . . Both roles are determined and controlled by men and lack autonomy" (Adair 1992 : 106-7). Valerie Rimmer has read *Swan Lake* (Rimmer, like Adair, doesn't specify *which* version of *Swan Lake*) according to Lacanian psychoanalytical theories of subjectivity and spectatorship. She argues that sexual difference is produced and controlled through the figure of Prince Siegfried but displaced onto the problematical spectacle of Odette.

The female body – The Swan Queen – is the site of obstacle, and as a swan by day and a woman between the hours of midnight and dawn, Odette is the culturally constructed ideal of femininity figured by the enigmatically beautiful swan. She signifies a faultless, spotless innocence both morally and spiritually and as such is imaged, by the spectator, as the proper object of the prince's, and by extension their desire. (Rimmer 1993: 211)

Rimmer's insistence throughout this essay on the resolute heterosexuality of desire has the same problems as the notions of 'gaze theory' which were discussed in the previous chapter, namely that identification and desire are kept separate and homosexuality is rendered impossible. Nevertheless Rimmer's characterisation of the swan as essentialised and idealised femininity is useful when analysing Bourne's version of *Swan Lake*. Although Bourne's 'copy' displaces the role of Odette onto a male dancer this does not necessarily construe a critique of the



misogynistic figure of the perfect ballerina since his Swan draws upon traditionally 'masculine' ballet vocabulary and does not parody or mimic the ballerina. As a spectre she is perhaps most manifest in Tchaikovsky's music which has become almost synonymous with the perfection of balletic feminine grace. When Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo perform their drag version of the White Act from *Swan Lake* then the humour arises precisely from the lampooning of feminine perfection. The men dance en pointe and in tutus to the various set pieces in this act, unfaithfully mimicking the ballerina's construction through notions of ideal femininity. This is not necessarily subversive and in many ways simply denigrates female dancers without questioning masculinity but it does acknowledge the exclusion of the ballerina. As I will discuss in the next chapter, in *The Hypochondriac Bird*, Javier de Frutos alludes to the ballerina when he uses her solo music from Act II of *Swan Lake* to perform a kissed seduction and he actively plays with the notions of effeminacy that are raised as he dances to her tune. Bourne however refuses to acknowledge her loss by not making a concession to her image – he concedes that the ballerina and Odette's theme are irredeemably linked but he suggests that he can sever the tie through hyper-masculine choreography;

The vision of a ballerina as the swan is so embedded in everyone's consciousness that it would have made it extremely difficult to supplant that image with my own ideas had I used female dancers. By using men you are wiping away all those mental pictures in the audience's mind . . . It was important for me that the swans have a *very masculine presence* and certainly no suggestion of feyness or camp. (Bourne 1996: 8, my emphasis)

Bourne is therefore attempting to eradicate, or 'wipe away' the link between swans and ballerinas through both an emphasis on a 'very masculine presence' and a rejection of signifiers of effeminacy. The ballerina is a ghostly melancholic absence when in the White Act, Cooper, as the un-Odette Swan, dances to her



famous solos with leaps and turns that are powerful and thrusting rather than graceful and ethereal. Arguably however in order to read this style as a 'very masculine presence', the ballerina's image is as necessary for AMP's *Swan Lake* as it is for the Trocks' camp parody. In ballet, as Ann Daly has suggested, the ballerina has always appeared as the sign of difference and the history of ballet is of a "rhetoric of gender differentiation" (Daly 1997: 114) whereby masculinity and femininity are secured through the dynamism of the powerful male dancer and the passive spectacle of the female dancer. Daly cites Lincoln Kirstein's praise of the display of difference as an example of this discursive production of gendered choreography;

In the best dance-theater, there is a polarity of male and female on an equal see-saw of elegance and muscularity. The power of the male for leaps in the lateral conquest of space sets off the softness, fragility, speed and multiplicity of the ballerina's action on point and in the sustainment of held, breathless equilibrium. Male dancers make girls more feminine and vice versa. (Kirstein cited in Daly 1997: 114)

In Bourne's *Swan Lake* the difference in performance styles between ethereal grace and wild animalism can therefore only be read as a gender difference if the ballerina is still present - to read The Swan's leaps of conquest as 'very masculine' a comparison has to be drawn with Odette's soft and fragile performance. Cooper's 'masculine' style evokes the 'feminine' ballerina despite itself. The exclusion of the ballerina therefore preserves her image in a misogynistic vision of feminine purity and it serves to affirm the masculinity of the Swan through the proof of difference - if Bourne's Swan is not Odette, who is femininity par excellence, then he is masculine, if only through default of being not-feminine. She is present in order for an audience to read difference in Bourne's piece but absent so that the swans are not identified with her which would trouble their masculinity and bring out the spectres of feyness and camp. Bourne's choreography does not therefore



readdress the gender inequalities of Swan Lake but reifies them through idealisation – the feminine ballerina is repeatedly buried in the idealised image of the not-feminine Swan.

Although Bourne's objective was to 'wipe away' the ballerinas and their femininity, Ann Nugent suggests in her review of AMP's *Swan Lake* that the swans have "a masculine weight and spring to their new-styled steps, yet also a feminine vulnerability in the openness of their chests and the gawkiness of their arms" (Nugent 1996: 77). Bourne asserts that, rather than mix 'male' and 'female' styles, he was trying to extend male vocabulary; he states in the video booklet that he wanted "to create something beautiful and lyrical for male dancers without emasculating them in any way" (Bourne 1996:8), which he reiterates in a later interview "I wanted to do something more lyrical for men – without emasculating them in any way" (Macaulay 1999: 208). This repetition of a lyricism *sans* emasculation ('in any way' – although it's clear that the 'way' he means is via an effeminate use of the body) reads like a nervous performative attempt to extricate a masculine presence from a series of ambiguous gender significations. Susan Foster suggests that the lyricism of the swans is in fact a territorialisation of feminine dancing – she argues that Bourne's exploration of a new male lyricism is an extension of the misogynistic degradation of women through the unattractive roles of the Queen and the Girlfriend;

It incorporates feminine features into the masculine bodies of the swans, reinvigorating patriarchal authority and endowing the male body with a new seductiveness. Erasing any anxieties that the presence of the female body might have provoked concerning corporeal spontaneity, frailty, fleshiness or unknowability, the swans cement the bonds of the homosocial world in which white male dominance is ensured. (Foster 2001: 197)



Foster however doesn't state why a female body alone could provoke these qualities of fragility or unknowability. Whereas I argue that the ballerina, and the idealised femininity she comes to represent, are threatening, these are not naturally or inherently linked to a 'female' body nor to 'feminine features', but are performatively iterated by the particular forms of gender performance in Bourne's *Swan Lake*. It is precisely the deployment of the disruptive force of spontaneity and unknowability on a 'male' body that I argue characterises Javier de Frutos's effeminate occupation of Odette's role, discussed in the following chapter. It is clear that the new lyrical seductiveness of the swans is beset by the anxieties of a disavowed femininity and the eradication of flocks of female swans by a 'masculine presence' proves to be that most paradigmatic of gender performatives – a promise. Shoshana Felman argues that "every promise promises the completion of incompleteness" (Felman 1983: 51) but this constitutive breach, or loss, means that "the performative, pushed to its extreme logical consequences, *enacts* its own subversion" (ibid. emphasis in original). The 'very masculine presence' of the swan-men attempts to overcome 'emasculinisation' but it is precisely the zeal of this promise of masculinity which raises the ghost of its 'incompleteness' and perpetuates the act of promising. The ghostly ballerina is therefore a figure that has the power to reveal a gender instability that the 'very masculine' performance denies. The fact that this gender instability is considered by Bourne to manifest as feyness and camp, popular signifiers of homosexuality, is significant in that homosexuality is equated with femininity, as inimical to masculinity. As Butler has argued, the conflation of femininity and homosexuality within dominant norms of masculinity reveals that gender is explicitly produced as heterosexual ; "the threat of a collapse of the masculine into the abjected feminine threatens to dissolve the heterosexual axis of desire; it carries the fear of occupying a site of homosexual abjection" (Butler 1993: 205). Both femininity and effeminacy<sup>6</sup> are rendered as abject but also as that which threatens to return and disrupt a masculine presence.



The performances of gender difference that Bourne suggests separates the Swan from Odette therefore comes at a price – it reifies an ‘emasculating’ feminine lack which has to be continually kept at bay through disavowal and fetishism. The Swan’s first appearance in the Prologue terrifies the young Prince and wakes him from his dreams. As the piece progresses however the Prince grows to long for this ghostly figure as a way of escaping his life which is spiralling out of control. The Prince is shown to be failing spectacularly in his royal duties, in a heterosexual romance and in his relationship with his mother. The spectral saviour who promises the transcendence of the Prince’s castrated state takes the form of a swan-man - the feathered breeches disguise the penis (and therefore any fear that it might not equate with the phallus) but they also emphasise and eroticise the naked torso and muscular arms. AMP’s publicity frequently features photos of the swan-men in poses with their arms raised above their heads to emphasise the masculine contours of their exposed chests. They are also lit on stage from the side to draw attention to the sweeping arms and thrusting jumps of Bourne’s choreography. This emphasis on strength and virility can be considered as fetishistic, as suggested by Steve Neale’s discussion of spectacular male movie stars;

The male body can be fetishised inasmuch as it figures within a fetishistic image or inasmuch as it signifies masculinity, and, hence, possession of the phallus, the absence of lack. (Neale 1986:130)

Although, as discussed in chapter two, Neale suggests that the male body cannot bear a feminising desiring gaze, this phallic display of swan-men produces a pleasurable spectacle of dancing male bodies which is not mitigated by any of the punishments that Neale identifies in mainstream Hollywood cinema. As Foster suggests, they occupy the position of seductive bodies without becoming feminised in the process;



They cavort, then pause to explore the sensuousness of movement's traversal across the body, then they conquer space, aggressively launching themselves into the air or across the stage. What continually astonishes in this celebration of a sensual identity is the fact that these are male dancers, their masculine musculature and agility imbuing the movement with sufficient rectitude to secure its maleness. (Foster 1997: 63)

This 'secure' maleness of the dancers is however tenuous and the choreography anxiously deploys fetishes to allow the erotic contemplation of the male bodies whilst warding off the spectre of effeminacy. Jennie Gilbert breathlessly writes that Adam Cooper "stands out a mile for his supple sensuality, his leaps as light as featherbedding, his primal animal presence" (Gilbert 1995: 15) and many other critics have praised the general sexy manliness of the swans – for David Jays "they are messengers of Pan's dangerous pleasures" (Jays 1996: 353) and for Rupert Christiansen "there is a sense of Dionysiac liberation in the air" (Christiansen 1996: 31). The swans' eroticised pagan lyricism, according to Bourne, is similar to Vaslav Nijinsky's, but, rather predictably, he asserts that it is "more masculine" (Macauley 1999: 194). Ramsay Burt argues that Nijinsky's most famous roles in Fokine's ballets (both from 1911) – the Golden Slave in *Schéhérazade*, the Spirit of the Rose in *Le Spectre de la rose* – are choreographed with a musicality and spatial patterning designed to showcase Nijinsky's virtuoso performance of jumps and sweeping jetés, signifying a masculinity in control of both the stage and his own body. Burt also suggests however that Nijinsky is also partly responsible for the popular association of ballet with male homosexuality. The erotic appeal of Nijinsky's ambiguous and androgynous performances, together with the large coterie of homosexual artists gathered by Diaghilev, created a scene around the Ballets Russes which codified homosexual desire and played a role in constructing a metropolitan 'gay' lifestyle. Susan Leigh Foster proposes that Nijinsky signalled the entrance of a visible, yet 'closeted', homosexuality into the erotic phallic economy of traditional ballet through a stylised virtuosity.



Clearly identified as homosexual in an age that had recently recognized homosexuality as a category, his performance in *Petroushka* [sic] and other ballets constructed an entirely new character type – the male performer as queered phallus. Deviant yet magnificent, always cast in the role of the exotic, Nijinsky specialized in a serpentine, even contorted bodily shaping combined with highest leaps ever made. (Foster 1996: 16)

Bourne directly references Nijinsky in choreography for the swan-men – the wreathing of arms over the head is for example taken from an image of *Le Spectre de la Rose*<sup>7</sup> - and his feathered fetishes share the phallicism of Nijinsky's performances but their 'more masculine' lyricism attempts to resolve the queer ambiguity that Foster identifies in his sensuous male body. The emphasis on jumps, weighty leaps and dynamic spatial patterns may hint at the presence of phallic control but the 'more masculine' promise fails to fully exorcise the queerness of eroticised lyricism. Freud emphasises that a fetish never completely vanquishes lack but conceals and commemorates it, and the perpetual threat of its exposure maintains the fetish in place.

We can now see what the fetish achieves and what it is that maintains it. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it. (*P.F.L.* 7: 353)

Any instance of fetishism therefore is both a securing, and the paradoxical disavowal, of sexual difference and a reminder of the masculine disintegration which propels the fetish. As Laura Mulvey has commented, "the fetish is always haunted by the fragility of the mechanisms that sustain it ... Knowledge hovers implacably in the wings of consciousness" (Mulvey 1996: 7 - 8). The mechanisms that sustain the 'very masculine presence' of the swans are those of melancholic incorporation, and the destruction of the fragile fetish through feminised



homosexuality hovers not just in the wings but haunts the entire stage. The eroticised body of Adam Cooper in particular as the ideal Swan, and therefore the quintessence of masculinity, is a fetishised declaration of masculinity against the threat of the female ballerina. The fact that she, and the effeminacy she represents, have to be repeated exorcised from both the choreography and the discussion of *Swan Lake*, suggests that this fetish commemorates a masculine lack that Cooper's performance can never fully conceal.

### 3.2b The Stranger and Homoeroticism

Adam Cooper's other role, that of *The Stranger*, can also be considered as fetishistic in terms of the spectral haunting of effeminacy. This role is a reworking of the Odette/Odile dichotomy of the traditional ballet where the chaste/good/white Odette is the ideal feminine counterpoised by the sexual/evil/black Odile. Valerie Rimmer suggests that Odile is a dangerous figure because her extreme performance of femininity seduces Siegfried away from phallocentric certainty; "The black swan as excess is aesthetic trouble to the dance performance, demonstrating the vigilance that is needed to protect against the danger of being deceived by a representation and not being in touch with original truth and knowledge" (Rimmer 1993: 212). Mats Ek's version of *Swan Lake* correspondingly figures the black swan as a hysteric – a dangerous, shouting, screaming, stamping and resistant woman. *The Stranger*, Bourne's version of Odile, dances the epitome of phallocentric control however, rather than a hystericised resistance to it. His two swans are variations on the theme of masculinity - the Swan is wild but tender whilst the black swan or black leather clad Stranger is a swaggering bully of a man. *The Stranger* is fetishised not only through his leather trousers and phallic wielding of a riding crop but also through his movements. In this section, Cooper as the Stranger is given fairly difficult leaps, pirouettes and jumps - he commands the stage with expansive and invasive jetes and he takes each female partner in an



eroticised duet where he clearly has control. The role of the Stranger is not as 'lyrical' as the Swan and it is here that Cooper again evokes the phallicism of Nijinsky's virtuosity in order to display masculine prowess but, unlike the Swan, he does it without the taint of effeminacy – "Tight leather trousers, black tailcoat and even (crikey) a whippy little riding-crop are all props Cooper needs to turn in a dangerously licentious performance that has every female at the party (and in the theatre) in his thrall" Gilbert 1995: 15).

Cooper's dancing therefore serves a fetishistic function in terms of the perception of the whole piece and its relation to masculinity. The role of the Stranger has little humour or pastiche and it almost reads like Bourne's concession to a traditional ballet audience. The young star of the Royal Ballet is shown doing virtuosic movements that display his skill and training and he is depicted as an attractive heterosexual man dancing conventional duets with willing women. It serves to disavow any doubts about Cooper's proficiency as a dancer and to affirm his position in the Royal Ballet's star system. It also serves to show him as a versatile dancer - he can be ethereal and lyrical but also, and more importantly, he can be vigorously hetero-normative. As Alastair Macaulay states in his question to Bourne about casting Cooper, the role seems to compensate for an ambiguity that the role of the Swan cannot dispel, despite a 'very masculine presence';

Adam is heterosexual. But you didn't even tell him that his role was going to have – as the Stranger in Act Three – plenty of hetero activities? (Macaulay 1999: 216)

As discussed above, the fetish of the Swan is haunted by the ballerina, and the role attempts to assert a lyrical masculinity to disavow her disruptive force. Although the White Act therefore gave Cooper a chance to display his talent he did so surrounded by a corps of semi-naked men and was gazed at adoringly by another man. In terms of narrative the Stranger is cast in an unfavourable light as a



manipulating macho show off but he is also constructed as irresistible to women or as Sophie Constanti puts it “as the Swan, Adam Cooper undulates and soars with all the poetic grace you’d expect but it’s his gate-crashing hard nut which simply oozes sex” (Constanti 1995: 7). This sex which is oozing through the choreography is explicitly, and aggressively, marked as hetero-sex and Cooper’s masculinity is hyperbolically reinstated in an attack of phallic leaps and jumps.

The Stranger cannot however fully protect Cooper from the homosexuality evoked by the pas de deux of Act II. Cooper acknowledges that even before the piece was choreographed, “I was worried that something I’d thought of as a rather nice love story was going to happen between two men, I was worried about how homoerotic it might be” (Gilbert 2000: 47). This worry was not restricted to Cooper but is spread throughout the reception of the piece. Emma Manning, editor of *Dance Europe* magazine, suggests in the editorial of the issue which featured Cooper as the Stranger on the front cover;

There are still far too many people out there who believe that dancing is something that ‘real men’ just don’t do... The assumption that all male dancers are automatically gay is equally misconceived, and decidedly distressing for the chaps that are as straight as the M1 without roadworks. Of course some male dancers are homosexual ... But frankly, whose business is it anyway? (Manning 1996a: i)

Manning puts the notion of ‘real men’ in an inverse relation to gay men to argue that dancing can be non-gay and therefore ‘really’ masculine. She suggests that a dancer’s sexuality is a private matter but, like most reviewers, nevertheless thought that it was the public’s business to know that Cooper is heterosexual. In an interview in the same issue of the magazine Manning asks:



In view of the fact that in AMP's *Swan Lake* he played the role of a male swan opposite a male prince, was he worried about being labelled gay?(Manning 1996b: 26)

And in this she echoes the anxiety of much of the press over the public's perception of the straightness and therefore the masculinity of Cooper who as a Royal Ballet star is often performing in heterosexual duets with the company's major ballerinas. Cooper's reply was that he was concerned but;

The amount of people that did come and say 'there's no homosexual aspect to it at all' was great. Obviously there are one or two people who saw what they wanted, but you can't do anything about that! (ibid.)

Cooper and Manning therefore attempt to ward off the reading of homosexuality as present only in the minds of those that 'nothing can be done about'. This dilemma over the presence or absence of homoerotic thematics in AMP's *Swan Lake* has been a major preoccupation of discussions of the piece to date. Whilst the piece received almost unanimous praise from the British dance press it came with qualifications and reassurances. Jann Parry in her review for *Dance Now* states in the first paragraph that the production is not a gay travesty (1995: 10), as does Allen Robertson in his article for the previous volume of *Dance Now* (1995a:2) and his piece for *The Times* has in large print "Matthew Bourne's gender bending *Swan Lake* is neither cheap-gimmick nor gay polemic" (1995b: 41). Clement Crisp in *The Financial Times* breathes a sigh of relief when he states that he is grateful that there is not "the least strain of homo-eroticism in the dance. The narrative is what it is, and no 'gay' sub-text need bother us in the relationship of the prince with the Swan" (Crisp 1995: 23).

The dance press in general are however bothered by homoeroticism but they try to direct an audience to avoid this threat by stating that a 'factual' reading of the piece



is one which is above any homosexuality. Jennie Gilbert in *The Independent* suggests that “only the crassest spectator...would call it the gay Swan Lake” (Gilbert 1995: 15), and Christopher Bowen in *The Scotsman* echoes this when he states that the reading of homoeroticism is a “crassly simplistic interpretation [which] entirely misses the point of Bourne’s dark and provocative production” (Bowen 1995: 18). Susan Leigh Foster risks these accusations of crassness and of missing the point when she attempts to read against the grain in her analysis of AMP’s Swan Lake. Foster suggests that it is the “coming-out story of a gay Prince, dominated by his mother, who finds no satisfaction in the royal regimens or underground getaways which comprise his life . . . This is a dance with a clear and timely message delivered with such deft agility and beguiling seduction as to win over the most hardened homophobe” (2001: 147 - 148). Her analysis proceeds however by suggesting that this reading is “closeted” not only by the dance press but also by the history of modern dance in America. After a US-centric outline not only of “modern dance’s closet” (2001: 151), but of the eradication of sexuality per se from modern dance, Foster retracts her earlier praise by suggesting that Bourne follows the tradition of American choreographers such as Ted Shawn by erasing difference, both ethnic and sexual, in a depiction of otherworldly homosocial transcendence in “a framework of hetero-normative assumptions about gay life” (2001: 198). Rather than offering affirmative depictions of gay male love, Foster argues that Bourne’s story renders homosexuality “deficient and pathetic on the one hand, unpredictable and bestial on the other” (ibid.). Like the British dance critics, Foster seems haunted by a ‘gay *Swan Lake*’ - she offers an optimistic reading to begin with in which Bourne’s swans “seem to burst through the closet’s door” (2001: 148) but then has to rescind this reading by suggesting that several mechanisms within the piece itself work to disavow the gay story. The result, according to Foster is a reactionary ballet which reifies patriarchy and “the closet” in similar ways to Bourne’s American predecessors.



Foster argues that Bourne's *Swan Lake* can therefore be considered as reflective of 1990s 'queer' culture through its participation in capitalist modes of identity production and consumption. Her particular definition of 'queer' is informed in part by a nostalgia for 1970s definitions of gay and lesbian community politics<sup>8</sup>, but what is useful in her argument is her link between the impossibility of homosexuality and the circulation of capital;

Insofar as dance can ever construct a marketable product, *Swan Lake* does so. In its carefully crafted integration of pantomime and virtuoso dancing, and in its contrast between the witty precision of the court and the soulful sinuosity of the swans, it reinscribes the aesthetic hierarchies that earlier postmodern choreographers, in the name of a danced politics, had broken down. For \$45 per ticket, viewers can feast on the visual and kinesthetic splendor they purvey at the same time that they are moved by the story of an impossible gay male love. (Foster 2001: 196)

*Swan Lake* is characterised by Foster as a 'queer' product, strategically niche marketed to a depoliticised queer-friendly market. The official disavowal of homosexuality by choreographer and critics is echoed in all of Bourne's interviews except for one in 'Gay Times' where he suggests that the relationship can be read as homoerotic but he also stresses the idealised image of the Swan as "the kind of person he has wanted to be since childhood" (Walder 1995: 14). The article is illustrated by a photo of Ambler leaning into Cooper's chest with his head resting back on Cooper's shoulder, with Cooper's arm draped across Ambler's chest. It has clearly been staged specifically for the article since they both have naked torsos and beards, and this particular pose does not occur in the piece. This kind of image is not however replicated in any other articles or publicity material and it becomes easy to read Bourne's explicit display of eroticised male bodies but his disavowal of desire as cynical marketing in that he does not want to risk audiences and investment in his company by identifying with a homosexual reading of his



piece except when wooing a “gay audience.” In the booklet that accompanies the video of the piece, Bourne is directly asked whether he has created a gay *Swan Lake* to which he replies that although he does not deny that it can be read in this way, “we have gone for something much simpler and more universal” (Bourne 1996: 8), an assertion which echoes Cooper’s notion that any homoeroticism is the result of the narrow mindedness of the audience member rather than the duets on stage. Although Bourne is attempting in some ways to keep the interpretation of the piece open rather than restrict the audience to one reading he repeatedly attempts to steer the audience away from any notion of homoeroticism. In interview with Macaulay, Bourne admits that the sexual issues of the work were of an interest to him to begin with but “because our production was so big and so much of a gamble (financially), I probably have played that down to some extent, in terms of the way I talk about it” (1999:194).

This statement, in which Bourne concedes to a homophobic desire for a non-controversial *Swan Lake*, suggests that for Bourne and his investors to have a success, homosexuality has to be doomed, both within the narrative of the piece and in the discussion of its meaning. The series of testaments to the absence of homosexuality that have structured the promotion and reception of *Swan Lake* indicate however that it remains haunted by the spectre of its reappearance. It would seem from both camps, the dance press and Bourne on one side and Foster on the other, that subversion in the form of either “gayness” or homoeroticism still hovers around the piece as a spectre in an ambiguous dialogue between presence and absence.

### 3.3 Identification and Desire

In order to address the problematic relationship between the Prince and the Swan, and to exorcise the spectres of homosexuality, the choreographer, the performers



and the dance press all describe the Swan as an ideal image rather than an erotic object. Bourne has asserted in many interviews that the Swan is the Prince's aspirational self not his lover;

The Swan . . . represents something he wants to be - free, strong and youthful. Its something he aspires to, something he dreams about but something he can't reconcile with his very restrictive royal life. (Robertson 1995b: 41)

The relationship between the Prince and the Swan is therefore not a fairytale romance of charmed figures as in Petipa and Ivanov's *Swan Lake* but an exploration of the internal world of the Prince. Whereas Odette is traditionally portrayed as a Queen cursed by an evil Magician to spend her days in swan form, only becoming human at night when she and her fellow swan maidens step out of the lake, the Swan, according to Bourne, is not human or even a character in his own right (and certainly not a Queen<sup>9</sup>) but a version of the Prince which appears to him in his dreams or moments of delirium. The swans are therefore not part of the 'reality' of the court that the Prince inhabits but are visions inside his mind and Act II and IV are more properly located in the psychological landscape of the Prince rather than a park or royal bedroom. Although two men in costume dance together on stage in intimate duets I want to here examine this narrative of an internal world of swans, rather than advance a reading of a straightforward gay romance, because the logic of internalisation and aspiration that it establishes illuminates not only the tragedy with the diegesis of the choreography but the fatality of homosexuality within the extra-diegetic discourses of masculinity and ideality that surround the piece.

Bourne suggests that the Swan represents to the Prince an idealised vision of masculinity, and as a result he doesn't want the Swan sexually but aspires to be like him. The Prince is depicted as a miserable figure and in his duties he



constantly fails to be man enough - he is frightened and cowers from the flash bulbs of the paparazzi, he cannot earn the respect of the royal subjects who mock him and he has allowed his servant, the Press Secretary, to set him up with an unsuitable girlfriend as part of an intricate scheme to depose him and send him mad. Privately he is emotionally crippled by the coldness of his mother, has an obsession with swans, and both an attraction to and fear of male affection, shown when he reacts violently to the advances of a sailor. This masculine inadequacy is choreographed through a vocabulary of awkward hunched turns and gawky, faltering extensions. His body is often portrayed as uncontrollable, as in the hysteria in Act IV, or excessive as in the drunken lurching of the club scene, and it communicates his neurosis and betrays his attempts to appear as 'manly'. Except during their duets, Ambler's performance does not command or describe the space like Cooper's but contracts and shrinks into it, and the Prince lacks the 'very masculine presence' of the Swan. If the Swan embodies his ideal then its appearance is representative of a masculine autonomy, strength and virility that the narrative of the piece suggests is ultimately unobtainable and unpossesable by the Prince, who kills himself for failing to embody the ideal.

There are various moments in the ballet when Bourne shows the Prince attempting to identify with this paragon figure of swannish masculinity. In the White Act the Prince tries to become the Swan by mimicking his movements as a way of performatively becoming this masculine ideal. When the plucked violin music of Odette's theme (the music which de Frutos uses to seduce Watton in *The Hypochondriac Bird*) is introduced, Ambler is on his knees downstage gazing out and upwards while Cooper is upstage right in an arabesque with his arm draped over his head. Ambler reaches out, as behind him Cooper begins to dance downstage in swooping turns with snaking arms - the fact that the Prince is extending his arm in yearning to a figure which he is not facing, and the fact that only Cooper is picked out of the general dark blue stage wash by a spotlight suggests that the Swan is a privileged image within the Prince's imaginary. This



figure however arrives directly behind Ambler and leans gently with his hip on Ambler's shoulder. This delicate contact initiates a pas de deux where both men dance a mirrored duet of extended turns with arched backs and curved arms where the Prince's awkward, inarticulate and cramped style gives way to the broad and confident sweeping style of the Swan. The reaching motif of the Prince, established in the Prologue, is also repeated here but the reaches extend into leans and lifts as the Swan meets the Prince's appeals for identificatory closeness. This choreography of identification however also includes moments of intimacy and affection - the Swan nuzzles into the Prince's chest, and he responds by throwing back his head, shivering with pleasure. Ambler strokes and cups Cooper's face or delicately holds his thigh when Cooper leans into him, giving Ambler his body weight as they turn. At moments throughout the White Act the Prince often frames the dancing by looking on from the corners of the proscenium arch or crouching downstage whilst the swan-men perform for him. The Prince fixes the dancing male bodies with an aspirational gaze that seeks to identify with the manliness on display. It is however a standard device in ballet to have a male dancer direct a desiring gaze on the erotic spectacle of a ballerina in precisely this way and in Act III there is a repeat of this framing device when the Stranger lies in the foreground and the Queen and the Princesses dance for him. As I've discussed in chapter two the dynamics of looking are key to notions of both identification and desire and in Act II the gaze does not run exclusively from Ambler to Cooper – often their faces are drawn close together as if to kiss – and there is no final resolution of whether the Prince desires to be or to have the shining, sweating, semi-naked body of the Swan.

A question therefore arises as to whether Bourne has successfully separated the process of idealised identification from that of desire. The aim of my analysis here however is not to argue that there is homosexual desire 'present' on stage, although clearly there is an eroticism in these duets, but instead to demonstrate that its very 'absence' is constitutive of an aspirational ideal. The idealisation of the



heterosexual male body of the Swan is itself a melancholic incorporation of foreclosed homosexual attachments. Desire is therefore integral to the relationship between the Prince and the Swan but in the form of a spectral homosexuality that must be disavowed (both choreographically and in discussions of the piece) in the projection of masculine ideality. Indeed desire and identification are not oppositional processes, but are complexly interlocked in the production and circulation of masculine ideals.

As discussed in chapter two, Freud describes identification as the formation of a subject through the incorporation of idealised gendered attachments. In *On Narcissism* (1914), he proposes the notion of an idealised image of bodily coherence and autonomy, the 'ideal ego', which represents to the child everything that it wants to be. This image becomes incorporated into the ego of the child, changing from the 'ideal ego' to the 'ego-ideal', and it stands as a measure against which the ego is judged. The narcissistic libido of self-love changes into a love of the ideal and it motivates the attempted identification with its form. In terms of the narrative of identification in *Swan Lake* therefore, the Swan is a revered ego-ideal image within the Prince's psyche and the jubilant duets involve the narcissistic pleasures which result from the meeting of the ego and the ego-ideal. Kaja Silverman has argued however that this kind of encounter is momentary and tenuous;

There is nothing more intoxicating than self-love. On those rare occasions when we imaginarily coincide with the ideal imago which we usually worship languishingly from afar, we experience an absolute thrilling euphoria... However, at such rapturous moments, the subject is 'filled up' in a dangerous way. Not only is the *moi* bloated with importance, but it functions in this distended form to conceal from the subject what founds him or her: lack. (Silverman 1996: 39)



In Act II the Prince becomes elated with exactly these kind of identificatory pleasures when he duets with his ideal, fetishistically concealing his masculine lack. However like all fetishes the rapturous becoming-swan vocabulary of the Prince marks his lack even as it offers to overcome it with a phallicised command of the body and stage. Silverman suggests that the meeting of the ego-ideal and the ego can happen only in “moments of mania or delusion,” (Silverman 1996: 39). and the pleasures these meetings offer are ultimately destructive. The Prince only dances with the Swan in moments of drink or drug-induced delusion and he cannot finally become The Swan – in Act IV his union with the ideal is rendered forever lost as multiple visions of masculine swan men wrench the ideal from the reach of his outstretched arms. As Silverman argues, the ideal is more commonly seen as exterior and untouchable and “the subject who yearns to approach it experiences not repletion but insufficiency, not wholeness but discordance and disarray” (ibid.) - it is precisely this chaotic fragmentation that the Prince eventually experiences. Steve Neale has argued that the impossibility that the ego could ever fully assume the ideality of the image it has taken in to itself means that the pleasures of identification with the ideal are offset by the anxiety of castration ;

The construction of an ideal ego . . . is a process involving profound contradiction. While the ego-ideal may be a ‘model’ with which the subject identifies and to which it aspires, it may also be source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate. (Neale 1983: 7)

The Swan is therefore not simply a symbol of hopes and aspirations but also a signifier of lack - his appearance is a complex fetish in that it serves to both offer the Prince idealised phallic power but also to remind him of his failure to be the man that society demands. As the breakdown in Act III suggests, the Prince’s failure to remain in a delusion unity with his ideal sends him further towards castration and the discordance and disarray of abjection and eventually to his



death. This explanation of the identificatory pleasures and pains of the Prince and Swan relationship needs further examination however, since it elides the question of why the Swan is incorporated as an ideal in the first place and why the Prince remains rapt in the pursuit of masculinity. Freud suggests that identification, the forming of the ego-ideal, involves the internalisation of a lost love-object and he argues that, in particular, homosexual libido is integral to the production and maintenance of an ideal. This is desire turned back on itself however to form a social conscience, where the ego's self-beratement for not approximating the ideal mirrors the pains of cultural surveillance and punishment;

In addition this ideal has a social side; it is also the common ideal of a family, a class or a nation. It binds not only a person's narcissistic libido, but also a considerable amount of his homosexual libido, which is in this way turned back into the ego. The want of satisfaction which arises from the non-fulfilment of this ideal liberates homosexual libido, and this is transformed into a form of guilt (social anxiety). Originally this sense of guilt was a fear of punishment by the parents, or, more correctly, the fear of losing their love; later the parents are replaced by an indefinite number of fellow-men. (*P.F.L.*, 11: 96-97)

A reading of the Prince according to Freud's formulation could therefore suggest that the pain of the withdrawal of his mother's love becomes experienced as a sense of guilt for not fulfilling the masculine ideal common to the (royal) family, the (upper) class, and the (British) nation. This ideal is incorporated into the Prince, as a sublimated homosexual attachment to the Swan, but this ideal evokes further guilty inadequacy experienced as the fear of an indefinite number of fellow-(swan)men. Freud suggests in *The Ego and The Id* (1923) that this psychic form of social conscience grows stronger if the loss cannot be grieved and in extreme cases of melancholia the ego-ideal (or 'super-ego' as it becomes) destroys the ego. The final Act where the flock of Swan-Men turn on both the Prince and the



Swan can be argued as the operation of the death drive, as Freud argues that, “the excessively strong super-ego which has obtained a hold upon consciousness rages against the ego with merciless violence . . . it often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death” (*P.F.L.*, 11: 394). This reading suggests therefore that the Prince’s ultimately self-destructive idealisation of the Swan reroutes homosexual desire into suicidal guilt through identification with a common ideal. However, as Judith Butler’s analysis of melancholia outlined in chapter two would suggest, it is not that the Prince first has homosexual feelings which are abolished in the incorporation of an ideal image but that the drive to approximate the impossible ideal is perpetuated through the refusal to acknowledge the loss of homosexual attachments. The prohibition on acknowledging lost homosexual desire leads to its institution within an ‘internal’ landscape.

Internalization preserves loss in the psyche; more precisely, the internalization of loss is part of the mechanism of its refusal. If the object can no longer exist in the external world, it will then exist internally, and that internalization will be a way to disavow the loss, to keep it at bay, to stay or postpone the recognition and suffering of loss. (Butler 1997b: 134)

Therefore the very topography of AMP’s *Swan Lake* and the location of the swans as the internal conscience of the Prince, rather than enchanted figures, is constituted through the incorporation of refused homosexual attachments which cannot be acknowledged as lost. A man becomes a man on the condition that he internalises the cultural ideals of masculinity which have been foreclosed as objects of desire. The Prince attempts to become a man through the establishment of internal figures of masculine ideality and the very swanness of their appearance could be said to be part of the fetish which disguises their formation through the enforced abandonment of homosexual attachments. The social prohibitions that proscribe the foreclosure of this desire, demand that its loss cannot be recognised nor mourned and the desire is therefore melancholically



incorporated in order to preserve it as never-lost and never-grieved. As Butler has argued hegemonic gender identification does not abolish homosexuality but uses it in the sustenance of renunciation and masculinity is itself constituted through the 'never-never' repeated disavowal of homosexuality. This suggests that what appears as 'very masculine' is therefore not the expression of a natural heterosexual disposition but the performative preservation of a culturally repudiated homosexuality; "what constitutes the *sexually* unperformable may – but need not – be performed as *gender identification*" (1997b: 147 emphasis in original).

If Bourne's *Swan Lake* is a story of the impossibility of ideals then the relationship of the Swan and Prince is clearly not one of either desire or identification but of both and of the complexities of ungrieved loss in the performance of masculinity. The idealisation of the Swan perpetuates a prohibited homosexual desire in the form of the internalised sustenance of a lost attachment. The Prince attempts to assume a firm and resolute masculine identity and to do so he must renunciate any attachment to other men since the ideal masculinity forecloses homosexuality as inadmissible in the phallic economy. He fails, and the murderous intent of the swans in the final Act is the Prince's projection of the disapproval of his family and society at large for this failure to embody a masculine ideal.

### 3.4 Mourning and Commodity Fetishism

The reading so far serves to illuminate the psychodrama within the choreographic narrative but I want to turn now to consider how the melancholia of the Prince can be analysed in the wider promotion and reception of the piece. Judith Butler's theories of gender melancholia are not directed towards an analysis of the mental disease of an individual but at a critique of the very construction of subjects through cultural prohibitions and unresolved grief;



When certain kinds of losses are compelled by a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions, we might expect a culturally prevalent form of melancholia, one which signals the internalization of the ungrieved and ungrievable homosexual cathexis. And where there is no public recognition or discourse through which such a loss might be named and mourned, then melancholia takes on cultural dimensions of contemporary significance. (Butler 1997b: 139)

Butler argues that this lack of public discourse for the naming and mourning of 'lost' homosexuality is not only important for rethinking how gender can be performed and experienced but it is also an important task of political action, particularly in the face of AIDS and the work of mourning that needs to be done to address and grieve the deaths of those who have already been declared socially dead through their failure to perform successful heterosexual genders. Butler cites the hyperbolic display of death in "die-ins" by Queer Nation activists as "life affirming rejoinders to the dire psychic consequences of a grieving process culturally thwarted and proscribed" (Butler 1997b: 148). Bourne's choreography deploys a similarly hyperbolic death in order to address the cultural melancholia which would doom the love of the Prince and the Swan and there is a sense in which Bourne is not simply repeating the culturally proscribed denial of homosexuality but is instead detailing the tragic consequences of the refusal to mourn these losses. I suggest in the next chapter that Javier de Frutos's work hyperbolically restages abandonment and loss in order to expose the norms that doom homosexual love and foreclose grief at its loss. Perhaps Bourne's piece with its masculine swans allegorises an act of mourning in its focus upon the interlocking processes of identification and desire, in its exposure of the homoerotics of idealisation. Mourning however acknowledges and thereby resolves the loss of the object and, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (*P.F.L.*, 11: 253). *Swan Lake* has no such resolution because it cannot free itself of the ideal fetish of the Swan and it cannot therefore



acknowledge the lack that it conceals. Both the Prince and Bourne are committed to a masculine ideal that cannot admit to feminine and homosexual identifications and which is therefore constituted through their very denial. *Swan Lake* denies the ballerina and homosexuality and the fetishisation of a 'very masculine presence' keeps it locked in an aspirational yearning towards impossible gender difference rather than a deconstruction of the cultural melancholia which sustain ideals. Homosexual love is not avowed or acknowledged, either within the narrative or in the discussion of the piece, and therefore its loss is not grieved and it remains the vanishing point of masculine idealisation.

Silverman argues that idealisation is an integral process, "without which human existence would be unendurable, and which is the precondition for every loving access to the other, whether identificatory or erotic" (1996: 37). This does not mean however that ideals are imposed unilaterally on a subject from a monolithic culture but that they are performatively recited in the process of identification. Cultural texts work therefore to both reify and refigure ideals;

Representational practice generally works to establish which objects are worthy of being idealized. It does so...by embedding them in a symbolic matrix which extends and deepens their semantic range, and so solicits libidinal investment. Certain objects are so widely represented as being worthy of idealization that they assume the status of normative ideals.

Nevertheless, no matter how often it is reiterated, an ideal remains a bloodless abstraction until it has been psychically affirmed. We alone are thus finally responsible for the production of ideals. (Silverman 1996: 40)

Silverman suggests that we cannot simply choose what to affirm or not but "we need to learn how to idealize oppositionally and provisionally" (1996: 37) through visual texts which denaturalise the hegemonic ideals and confer ideality on other bodies. In chapter five I suggest that *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch*



*Books of Egon Schiele* reworks ideality by collaging the cool allure of The Featherstonehaughs with the abject homoerotic bodies of Schiele's portraits, but Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* uses the male bodies of the swan-men to reify normative ideals of heterosexuality not to attack, disfigure or rework them. Silverman argues that the affirmation of normative ideals leads to commodity fetishism, as proposed by Karl Marx in *Capital* (1867). In Marx's terms the commodity fetish disavows the physical means of its production in order to enter into an value-exchange system with other commodities and it results in the attribution of value to certain images over others.

When the subject idealizes what is most culturally valorized, the idealized object becomes almost automatically fetishized in the Marxian rather than the Freudian sense of the word. Affirmed both representationally and psychically it begins to seem intrinsically more valuable than other objects, substantially superior. Although the subject has constituted that object as an ideal, he or she often falls prostrate before it, in thrall to its fascinating luster. (Silverman 1996:40)

Bourne readily admits that Cooper represents something of an ideal to him and he cast him in the role of the Swan precisely because of the 'fascinating luster' he would bring;

I suddenly thought it would be brilliant to have someone in the Swan role who was from another world. That's how I saw ballet dancers. I idolised them, because ballet glamorises its dancers in a way contemporary dance doesn't. I liked the idea of bringing this creature into our world, and Adam was perfect for the image I wanted. He's beautiful, very lyrical, but thoroughly masculine at the same time. (Gilbert 2000: 47).



Bourne's recruitment of Cooper into the company for this piece therefore is neither oppositional or provisional but an adoption of his supposedly intrinsic masculinity and superior commodity value in order to bring some ballet glamour into the world of contemporary dance. This glamour is precisely what many postmodern choreographers have critiqued, perhaps most explicitly in Yvonne Rainer's rejection of "the glamour and transcendence of the star image," in 1965<sup>10</sup>. Evan Alderson suggests that, in opposition to the deconstruction of glamour in contemporary dance, "one of ballet's charms is the overtness with which it propagates socially charged imagery as a form of the beautiful," (Alderson 1997: 122). This 'beauty' in ballet is coextensive with the conservative notions of gender and class that it propagates and, although it is male 'beauty' that Bourne is idolising, his uncritical desire for glamour places him in the company of balletomanes rather than postmodern choreographers. Traditional ballet serves to affirm normative ideals and to give them an 'intrinsic' value that allows their stars to operate as commodities. Bourne's choreography places the commodity fetish of Cooper in a new setting but this extends his 'masculinity' and 'glamour' rather than deconstructs it. Michael Clark is a controversial British choreographer who plays with the fetishism and glamour of balletic vocabulary through a displacement of commodities and a punkish collage aesthetic, and his attack on ballet is often compared by critics to Bourne's gentle reworkings. Bourne himself states that Clark can dance 'beautifully' but his reconfigurations of the glamour and ideals of ballet left him cold;

I can't say all the stuff that surrounded it appealed to me at all: the punkish music, the dildos and bare bottoms, swallowing a goldfish - the shock values. I've never actually been into shock tactics in any way. I don't like being in an uncomfortable audience very much; I like the audience to be happy with what they're watching. (Macaulay 1999: 37)



This emphasis on the comfort of the viewing audience suggests more than just a conservatism in Bourne's choreography however, it points to the piece's integration with commodity fetishism and to the reification of ideality not just within the diegetic confines of the Prince's melancholia but with the cultural circulation of gender norms. The figure of the Swan does not attack or reconfigure ideality, nor adopt it provisionally, but seems to exude an intrinsic masculine value. *Swan Lake* therefore facilitates a slippage between the Prince's subjugation to masculine norms, Bourne's idolisation of ballet and a cultural consumption of the male body. Laura Mulvey in 'Fetishism and Curiosity,' (1996) suggests that the commodity fetish does not signify the mode of its production or its economic worth but it conceals these with its allure as a sexualised spectacle;

Commodity fetishism . . . bears witness to the persistent allure that images and things have for the human imagination and the pleasures to be gained from belief in phantasmagorias and imaginary systems of representation. Objects and images, in their spectacular manifestations, are central to the process of disavowal, soaking up semiotic significance and setting up elisions of affect. Most of all they are easily sexualised. (Mulvey 1996: 5)

The glamour of ballet and hence the 'beauty' of Cooper operate on this spectacular level as they disavow the modes of production which underpin both the Royal Ballet's bourgeois ideology and the heterosexual gender politics of balletic ideals. Mulvey also links the Freudian fetish with the production of sexualised bodies in that it "constructs a phantasmatic topography, a surface, or carapace, which hides ugliness and anxiety with beauty and desire" (ibid.). An uncritical emphasis on 'beauty', 'glamour' and 'masculinity' in *Swan Lake* is therefore presented in a narrative spectacle of phantasmatic swans which promise to comfort an audience with their affirmation of dominant cultural values. Rather than shock or disturb with a critique of the pervasive melancholia that dooms homosexuality within masculine ideals, Bourne invokes both Freudian and Marxist fetishes to stave off mourning



and to perpetuate a 'very masculine presence' that remains ultimately, and fatally, out of reach.

### 3.5 Conclusions

Since its première in 1995, Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* has been cited as a piece which has significantly altered the perception of men in dance. A profile of Bourne by Luke Jennings in the *Evening Standard* calls him a "messiah" (2000: 11) who brought the message that men could dance to a large crossover audience. In Bourne's documentary about men in dance, *Bourne to Dance* (2001), he firmly traces the lineage of the Swan back to Nijinsky and forward, through *Billy Elliot*, to the male dancers of the future. In the documentary Bourne is open about his gay identity but he suggests that progress has been made so that men can dance without the taint of effeminacy or homosexuality. Bourne, in this documentary and in the many interviews that he has conducted, states that he wants to secure 'a very masculine presence' against the ghosts of 'feyness' and 'camp'. It would seem that this shift in male dancing precipitated by *Swan Lake* requires a compulsory loss of homosexuality not just through the bar on a performance of signifiers of 'campness' or 'effeminacy' but in the discussion of dancing men. The 'masculinity' that Bourne identifies in Cooper, and promotes and idealises in *Swan Lake*, demands that homosexuality disappears but this is not achieved through a silence but through an active discursive silencing. Homosexuality is repeatedly invoked in order to pre-empt its manifestation but the anxiety of Bourne, Cooper and the critics exposes the instability of a masculine ideal that requires homosexuality to be repeatedly repudiated through a continual invocation of its name.

Of course it is possible to read against Bourne and the British dance press to enjoy a danced homoerotic relationship between the Swan and the Prince that affirms



rather than disavows gay love. Indeed, although many writers state categorically that this is not a gay *Swan Lake*, there are several characters or events in the piece that can be decoded by a knowledgeable audience as signifying a gay cultural reading – much of the first act involves a camp send-up of the monarchy, complete with clockwork corgis, naked statues and a Gilbert and George-esque portrait of the Queen. Gay icons Sister George and Joe Orton are amongst the characters in the Swank club at the end of Act I. The piece itself has been cited in gay contexts – some of the choreography for the swan-men in the White Act has been performed at gala performances for the gay rights campaign group Stonewall and many of Bourne's other works, both before and after *Swan Lake* have featured recognisable 'gay' characters. *Swan Lake* in both the narrative and extra-diegetical engagement with masculinity, makes clear however that gay desire is doomed, not simply because of societal disapproval, but because it is incommensurate with normative masculinity. Rather than use the force of hysterical disruption to attack the ideals of masculine performance which demand the death of homosexuality, *Swan Lake* presents the smooth fetish of an unobtainable ideal which causes the Prince's descent into illness, choreographically reifying the violence of melancholic incorporation. Bourne's Prince therefore dies because his homosexual disease cannot impact upon or reconfigure the ideals of a 'masculinity' which needs to be actively normalised and naturalised as heterosexual. The idealisation of the Swan abjects homosexuality from the performance of a 'masculine presence' and the sensuous maleness of the swans and the economic mobility of the image of the Swan reify the melancholic foreclosure of grief at the casting of homosexuality as always already lost. If the trajectory of the piece maps out a relationship forbidden and destroyed by society then it does offer potential as a cultural text which deploys a performance of death to detail the workings of melancholia. However the fetishisation of the Swan, as both an ego-ideal and a marketable commodity recites the very processes which render homosexual desire unlivable and ungrievable and so, paradoxically, the piece demands the very death that it mourns .



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<sup>1</sup> See Moe Meyer (1994) for a discussion of Sontag's de-queering of camp.

<sup>2</sup> My analysis is based on live viewings of the piece and a filmed version (1996) directed by Peter Mumford.

<sup>3</sup> The most exhaustive explication of the plot can be found in Macaulay's *Matthew Bourne and his Adventures in Motion Pictures*, London: Faber 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed other versions of Act II are often performed separately as pieces in their own right – the first version of *Swan Lake* to be seen in Britain was a staging of Act II as part of a variety show at the Hippodrome in 1910 (Robertson and Hutera 1988:31). When Bourne has shown excerpts of the piece at galas they have come from this Act.

<sup>5</sup> Silverman suggests that the male homosexual identifies with his mother and incorporates her lack, "in effect, he provides this missing organ through his own body" (1996: 372). Silverman thus problematically retains desire and identification within a heterosexual division of gender and difference.

<sup>6</sup> In Chapter Four I consider the notion of effeminacy in more detail with particular reference to de Frutos's occupation of the 'feminised fag' role. Here I discuss effeminacy in a more general sense as signifying a de-masculinised homosexual body.

<sup>7</sup> Choreographed by Michel Fokine in 1911 – see Macauley 1999: 191-194 for a discussion of the use of this image.

<sup>8</sup> In this essay Foster's notion of political choreography is partly based in contact improvisation and the alternate, non-hierarchical communities that formed around it. Her notion of 'queer', deriving from Sue-Ellen Case's critique, is of a consumer label which groups lesbians and gay men into a homogenous 'pseudo-coalition' which disavows racial and class differences. Whilst the term queer has certainly been used in mainstream gay culture in this way I would resist her collapse of queer theory into this definition and in particular Judith Butler's interrogation of identity and reformulation of kinship that informs my use of 'queer'.

<sup>9</sup> Allen Robertson notes that "Adam Cooper is not meant to be playing a Swan 'Queen' – in either sense of the word," (1995a: 7) thereby colluding in Bourne's rejection of the traditional Odette role and his assertion that the role is not in drag (as in drag 'queen') nor gay (as in the more generalised use of 'queen' to mean an effeminate man).

<sup>10</sup> Valerie Briginshaw (1996) has argued that Lea Anderson has used various elements of glamour and ideality in her choreography but always in a self-reflexive and deconstructive way. See 'Getting the Glamour on Our Own Terms' in *Dance Theatre Journal* 12 (3).



#### 4. Javier de Frutos – Bleeding Hysterics

Javier de Frutos is a Venezuelan-born choreographer who began making work in Britain in the early 1990s, quickly catching the attention of both the dance press and festival programmers by performing naked. This chapter will examine two of his pieces; a trio, *Grass* (1997) and a duet *The Hypochondriac Bird* (1998), in terms of how they stage abjection through hysterical hyperbole. In chapter two I discussed the notion of abjection in terms of the constitutive exclusions which delineate the boundaries of a contained body. Here I investigate how de Frutos's choreography uses blood, nudity, sex, effeminacy and exoticism to trace vectors of disgust and excess which breach the masculine coherent self and violate the opposition of inside and outside. The discussion also relates to the opposition of 'realness' as authentic to 'theatricality' as performed, constructed and superficial. As I explored in chapter one, theories of performativity, particularly those of Judith Butler, maintain an ambivalent dialogue with discourses of theatrical presentation and this complex relationship of iteration to expressivity is elaborated in de Frutos's occupation of pathologically vengeful characters. I identify a common reading of the homosexual violence and self-abasement in these characters as expressing the 'truth' or 'reality' of de Frutos's identity as a gay man. In contrast to this autobiographical expressivity I want to investigate how de Frutos plays out the part of the abject homosexual and ask if there is a possibility of subverting the very discourses which cast him in this role. Like Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*, discussed in the previous chapter, the choreography details the violence of unnatural desires and unliveable genders. The hysterical intensity of de Frutos's performance is however very different from Adam Cooper's 'masculine presence' as the Swan, and I consider if the melancholic proscription of lost homosexuality and an inevitable fall into illness can be repeated unfaithfully through strategies of hyperbolic rage in order to contest hegemonies of bodies and desires.



#### 4.1 The pieces

*Grass* is a trio for two men (de Frutos and Jamie Watton) and a woman (Pary Naderi). It was presented in the 1997 Dance Umbrella, and toured internationally, subsequently winning the 1997 South Bank Prize for Achievement in Dance. The stage set by Terry Warner consists of a gauze backdrop and a perforated white circle painted on the floor, suggestive of a focus or target, with Michael Mannion's lighting design casting most of the stage in darkness except for a pool of light picking out this central circle. The score, arranged by de Frutos, is Maria Callas's recording of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* cut-up with the sequence of the operatic pieces rearranged and the tempos altered. The excerpts of the opera are played at high volume, causing distortion and reverberation, punctuated by inserts of long passages of silence. The work is split into two 'acts', separated by an interval, and in terms of narrative the first half details a troubled ménage à trois where de Frutos vies with Naderi for the attention of Watton.

The choreographic surface is a light tissue of elegantly inventive steps, but the underlying dynamics are treacherous. De Frutos shows how easily friendship can be betrayed and ousted by passion, and Naderi is thrust aside as he hones into Watton, kissing him with the blind hunger of a vampire. (Mackrell 1997: 12)

Following a series of skipping games and increasingly violent competition, de Frutos gets his man, and through violent stamps and shouts he dispatches Naderi to a spectral performance behind the gauze curtain. The second half consists of a naked duet for the two men with 'blood' smeared around their orifices which suggests that some violent coupling has occurred in the interval between acts.

Their dance together is flayed, tormenting, often hateful to watch...De Frutos is driven to kill his lover in order to rid himself of his own obsession.



And as he does so, he's almost physically dribbling and weeping, reminding us that the reality of tragedy always comes down to snot and spittle and gore. (ibid.)

The duet is mostly floor bound with an overriding sense of collapse – the dancing bodies perform exhausted echoes of lovemaking but Watton seems to fade away as de Frutos drags him around. The piece builds with a mounting sense of horror and abjection and as the operatic score surges the final image is of a psychotic de Frutos. The choreography plays out the flailing limbs, clutching hands and violent spasms of hysterical fits as de Frutos twitches and contorts over the prone body of Watton in an autistic act of impossible mourning.

In *The Hypochondriac Bird* de Frutos worked again with Jamie Watton and choreographed a duet to the sounds of waves crashing, Hawaiian hula and extracts from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. Watton is dressed in a white suit with ruffled shirt while de Frutos wears a flower-print circle skirt which frequently rises up to reveal no underwear. Unlike *Grass*, *The Hypochondriac Bird* is brightly lit (again by Michael Mannion) with watery blue stage washes and Terry Warner's luminous white inflatable squares marking the stage space. The piece is also lighter in tone - there is no blood and little physical violence. The choreography is often comic, using the music as an incongruous accompaniment to synchronised groping, kissing and suggestions of sex with the piece focusing primarily on seduction and sexual pleasure. The snot, spittle and gore of *Grass* are replaced with suggestions of other bodily fluids - indeed whereas the bloodied orifices in *Grass* attested to offstage sex, *The Hypochondriac Bird* has a main section of rhythmically repetitive choreographed 'sex' with de Frutos and Watton exploring all manner of pleasurable possibilities and positions – "it's not so much steps we see as choreographed variations on the sexual act. The Joy Of Gay Sex, danced" (Mackrell 1998b: 18).



*The Hypochondriac Bird* is less narrative than *Grass* although it consists of a number of scenes strung together which sketch out a relationship between the two men. De Frutos flirts with and seduces both Watton and the audience but, following the section of choreographed sex, the relationship takes a turn for the worse and de Frutos again rejects the object of his desire. As with *Grass* there is an element of psychosis as de Frutos is compelled to fall physically and psychologically ill (the hypochondria of the title) from the impossibility of his relationship. The hysterical intensity of *Grass* is also repeated here as de Frutos repeatedly slices through the space with a desperate semaphore of spasmodic twitching limbs, accompanied by incoherent shouts, as Watton crumples beneath the force of de Frutos's hysteria.

Both pieces therefore explore a specific kind of melancholia in that the possibility of homosexual relationships seems foreclosed and therefore their loss cannot be mourned nor acknowledged except through a kind of psychotic choreography. This convergence of impossible desire and hysterical bodily self-harm links it with Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* in that homosexual desire haunts the stage and forewarns of its own death. Bourne attempts to detail this cultural melancholia yet simultaneously fetishises the very notions of masculinity which cast homosexuality as the impossible identification. De Frutos however rejects the kind of conservative masculinity performed in *Swan Lake* and approaches the culturally proscribed loss of homosexual attachments through the playing out of the abject figure of the excessive, effeminate and ultimately tragic hysterical homosexual. Unlike Bourne's production the choreography doesn't depict straightforward narratives or clearly defined characters and de Frutos's pieces are troubling in that the extreme performances are neither fully realistic or fully theatrical but stage a dialogue between these seeming oppositional traits.



## 4.2 Theatrical Excess

The hysteria repeatedly performed by de Frutos is ambivalent – it seems to reify the reduction of male homosexuality to a fatal physical and mental sickness but it also appears as a repeat of these conventions in order to resist normative ‘masculinity’. According to Diana Fuss, ‘Dora’, Freud’s celebrated hysteric patient, suffers (or enjoys) a similar ambivalence – her “hysteria enacts a passive-aggressive refusal of oedipality at the same time that the particular form that it takes, illness, conforms entirely to a socially acceptable norm of femininity” (Fuss 1995: 117). As Fuss proposes, this seeming contradictory form of resistance, which risks being reduced to the very discourse it repeats, poses questions for the reading of any subversive efficacy.

Hysteria seems to me notable for its political unintelligibility; its importance lies in its own resistance to recuperative readings. This is not to say that hysteria stands outside politics, only that the exercise of reading the unreadable hysterical body forces us to think politics differently, without reliance on simple oppositions. (Fuss 1995: 117)

De Frutos’s choreography resists any easy reading of its relation to hegemonic norms of the abject, sick and deathly homosexual – it offers neither confirmation nor a transgression of these violent forms of subjection. Judith Butler suggests that subject formation always contains an element of murderous rage – certain attachments are not simply refused but, through abjection, they are consigned to suffering, death, and a less-than-human position within the dominant economies of representation. Nevertheless these abject sites cannot be refused by those consigned to the margins of hegemonic gender since they offer recognition and confer subject status, however debased.



If wretchedness, agony, and pain are sites or modes of stubbornness, ways of attaching to oneself, negatively articulated modes of reflexivity, then that is because they are given by regulatory regimes as the sites available for attachment, and a subject will attach to pain rather than not attach at all. (Butler 1997a: 61)

As I will argue below, de Frutos's performance of homosexual desire as excessive, effeminate, unnatural and deadly, takes up hegemonic representations of abject gay identity as always already wretched and doomed. It is my contention, however, that de Frutos does not simply affirm these homophobic constructs but overplays them in order to comment on the process of abjection and the violent exclusions of identification which can not be refused outright but can be occupied, theatricalised and 'queered'. Like Fuss, Butler suggests that a political contestation of abject sites, such as that of the "feminized fag" (1993:103), cannot come from a secure identity position outside of these discourses but rather from a critical engagement with the dual processes of identification and abjection, thereby rephrasing the whole question of what 'identity politics' might be. Rather than simply argue for recognition and equality as a coherent "feminized fag" subject, or for an increased visibility of "fags" within dominant representation, Butler argues that a political enquiry into identity needs to consider the processes whereby this subject position is brought into being as the abjected outside of straight masculinity. The 'fag' should be investigated and revealed as the constitutive failure of the very masculinity which rejects and abjects homosexual identifications. Butler suggests the focus should shift to question "the cost of articulating a coherent identity-position if that coherence is produced through the production, exclusion and repudiation of abjected spectres that threaten those very subject-positions" (1993:113).

Both *Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird* not only feature de Frutos as the vengeful abject spectre reeking violence on the sexed and racialised desiring positions that



would repudiate him but they also reveal the complexities of abjection and the compulsive attachment even to abject sites. Whereas in the previous chapter I suggested that Matthew Bourne's choreography attempted a kind of realistic hysteria, de Frutos's work has a fragmented narrative and an emphasis on formal patterns of repetition. This attention to formal choreographic structure is juxtaposed with the character-driven theatricality of his work – the resulting effect is more similar, I will argue, to hysterical realism in that his body enacts “its historical signification and reflexively or ironically re-perform[s] its symptomatology” (Schneider 1997: 116). As Elisabeth Bronfen has argued, a deployment of hysteria both repeats and extends the dominant representations of gender identity but does so in order to comment upon those images which interpellate the subject into illness.

The hysteric...performs to excess precisely the representation of femininity her culture has ascribed to her. One could say she imitates and represents at her body the role-images of western art. Furthermore the hysteric's self-performance in some sense is always self-reflexive...It performs an overt disjunction between 'true being' and 'appearance'...The self-reflexivity of her psychosomatic performance continually draws our attention to how she knots together the representations within which she is emplaced in a fashion particular to her, and through the particularity moves beyond the realm of imaginary and symbolic inscriptions, indeed performs their limit. (Bronfen 1996: 45)

In de Frutos's case he uses his body to perform to excess the 'femininity' which hegemonic representations of male homosexuality have ascribed to him. Dancing a role which is effeminate, sickly, and deadly, he explicitly enacts a disruptive hysterical masquerade and in the following discussion I will explore the challenges to the distinction between 'true being' and 'appearance', between the 'real' and the 'theatrical', and I will also investigate the limits of representations performed by de



Frutos's intense hysterical realism. Schneider's suggestion that hysterical realism enables the performer "to escape the very signification her body speaks" (Schneider 1997: 116) is however problematised by claims of an 'authenticity' to de Frutos's work, made both by dance critics and by de Frutos himself. De Frutos's choreography is therefore neither fully 'real' nor fully 'theatrical' – it dances ambiguously between and around these categories, and his occupation of the site of the feminized fag reveals the complex intertwining of repetition and resistance in performative acts. The chapter will examine this complexity in de Frutos's use of blood, nudity and sex and his performance of identity in terms of the various debates around effeminacy, autobiography and 'race'.

#### 4.2a Blood

The second half of de Frutos's *Grass* involves Watton and de Frutos in a duet where they are naked with 'blood' smeared around their mouths and anuses. The choreography frequently draws attention to these orifices as the men writhe on the floor with splayed, open legs, with hands frequently wiping both mouth and backside. The emphasis on both permeability and leakage in this duet stages the male bodies in distinctly non-phallic ways and the bloodiness feeds upon fantasies of the violence that penetration and passivity can confer upon masculine norms of the body. The accentuation of anality and orality can also be said to refer to the Freudian notion that homosexuality involves a regression back to the oral and anal stages of sexual development. In chapter two I explore how Freud links homosexual desire with a murderous incorporation in the totem meal which marks the subject's entrance into civilisation. Diana Fuss has read this in relation to the film *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and the Jeffrey Dahmer case to consider how contemporary significations of homosexuality still figure a voracious appetite which devours the ideal;



Mouth substitutes for anus, and anus for mouth, as each comes to symbolize the gaping, grasping hole that cannibalistically swallows the other...In the history of Western psychoanalytical representations of the ravenously hungry, insatiably promiscuous male invert, *gay sex has always been cannibal murder*. (Fuss 1995: 84 emphasis in original)

Stopping short of actually consuming Watton's body, de Frutos acts out this role of insatiable murderer – he is “driven to kill his lover in order to rid himself of his obsession” (Mackrell 1997: 12) and the ‘blood’ is an integral prop in his choreography of violent incorporation. I want to argue that beyond this signification of a narrative of violent desire there is also an exploration of the violence of abjection and the casting of homosexual desire as polluting and fatally infectious. In order to consider this hyperbolic performance of abjection, I want to turn to consider how Franko B. and Ron Athey have been analysed in terms of their engagement with discourses of bodily pollution, abjection and homosexuality – as I will argue the lauded ‘authenticity’ of their bloodletting work is not replicated in de Frutos's choreography, where he deploys a theatricalised bloodiness. Whereas *Grass* uses fake blood both Athey and Franko B. cut themselves and open their veins as part of their performances but I want to reconsider this division of falsity and the ‘real’ thing in order to enquire how de Frutos exposes the performativity of abjection and the iterative status of the masculine body rather than its authenticity.

Franko B. is a performance artist based in London who utilises the iconography of hospitals in his performances involving the cutting, bleeding, injection, catheterising and stitching of his body by his white-coated assistants. Ron Athey is based in Los Angeles and, together with his collaborators, he stages s/m rituals which include bloodletting, piercing, crucifixion and sex. Patrick Campbell and Helen Spackman identify these two artists as dealing directly with abjection through performance;



Piercing the flesh and opening up the sphincter is central to both Franko B. and Athey. In both their performances, “abject” materials – blood, saliva, feces issuing from an enema – spill forth onstage as a celebration of the “grotesque body.” Both men are “queer” performers, both may be read as proffering their corporeal selves as a sacrificial altar to their art. (Campbell and Spackman 1998: 59).

Despite these similarities however Campbell and Spackman perceive within these abject performances differing approaches to homosexuality based on varying degrees of theatricality and narrativity;

Athey’s work is a response to his own homosexuality, to the AIDS pandemic, and to his protracted infection with HIV. Where, demands Athey, can queers draw their traditions from?...In *Deliverance* [a piece from 1995], Athey and his male partner couple violently, bloodily using an artificial phallus in a more dramatic assertion of *bludbruderschaft*. Such togetherness, affirming a sexuality condemned by a homophobic establishment on both sides of the Atlantic, is conspicuously absent from Franko B.’s work. This “lack” reinforces his passionate insistence that despite his openness about his homosexuality, his art should not be categorized – and dismissed – as “gay.” The physical contact between Franko B. and his stage assistants remains unsettlingly indifferent...The overriding sense is of Franko B.’s isolation relative to both his assistants and spectators. Taking a different tack, Athey intersperses visually enacted scenes with direct verbal addresses to the audience incorporating autobiographical material with the effect of disrupting and defamiliarizing conventional theatricality. (Campbell and Spackman 1998: 60)

John Edward McGrath, writing about Athey’s *Martyrs and Saints* (1993), also highlights the “inherently theatrical” spectacles staged by Athey but, he argues, it is



“blatantly badly done and clichéd. The images – St. Sebastian et al. – are overused, the props are poorly made, and not even in some campy fun way; this is just bad theatre” (McGrath 1995: 27). This ‘inherent theatricality’ is a key element of *Grass* and it too, therefore could be dismissed by McGrath as theatre with nothing to say. What ‘saves’ Athey’s work for McGrath is the realness of the blood and the play on boundaries – the abject messiness but also the emphasis on rubber. McGrath’s concern is to analyse Athey in terms of infection and protection since HIV positive blood leaking on stage is met by rubber sheeting and rubber-gloved assistants, thereby reclaiming the condom as part of practices of desire. This interaction of blood and rubber, for McGrath, is the moment of ‘realness’ – it is here, when bleeding, that Athey’s work becomes “radically antimetaphorical” (McGrath 1995: 29).

Rather than suggest that Franko B.’s bleeding is antimetaphorical Campbell and Spackman suggest that “blood is the key element in Franko B.’s work, carrying multiple associations, charged with religious as well as more secular associations of contamination” (Campbell and Spackman 1998: 61). Nevertheless in the interview which follows their article, Campbell emphasises the ‘authenticity’ of the performance and asks;

“Your decision to use your own real blood – tell us more about this, about the way you close the gap between art and life: the real blood, cutting – this gives your work tremendous strength, we’re watching the real thing.”  
(Campbell and Spackman 1998:73)

To which Franko B. replies “why pretend?”(ibid). This emphasis on ‘the real thing’ of real blood establishes an opposition to a kind of inauthentic theatrical performance of abjection – such as in de Frutos’s work. Lynda Hart has written about the disavowal of theatricality in both the production and/or reception of much



queer performance art and she questions the search for a kind of realism based in the materiality of the body or in the enactment of sex.

It strikes me as particularly interesting, and relatively unnoticed, that these performances, which have become so vexed for their 'realness' (real or presumed!) are ... firmly with the parameters of a vast discourse that is none the less recognizable as queer sado-masochism ... in other words, we are talking about 'scenes' that have either been taken *for* real, with the artist's complicity [here she is specifically referring to Athey] or have been assumed to be real. (Hart 1995: 58)

What is 'real' therefore has to be 'taken for real' – it has to be a convincing representation of realness; it has to be read as real and simultaneously the act of reading is concealed in order to disavow its status as a signified 'real' rather than a return to a prediscursive materiality. This focus on a 'queer real', argues Hart, denies the performative nature both of the pieces and of the material bodies, in all their messiness, which are being staged as the referent for these symbolic performances. The 'blood' within *Grass* is not 'real' blood and so according to McGrath's reading of Athey and Campbell and Spackman's analysis of Franko B. there would seem to be something inauthentic or metaphorically theatrical about de Frutos – he's not the 'real thing' because he is not really bleeding. But does this matter, that it is not 'authentically' abject matter leaking from the men's orifices? I accept that in terms of the production and reception of the piece, the stage-blood certainly makes a difference – unlike Franko B., who can only perform safely a few times a year due to blood loss, de Frutos and Watton could smear themselves with 'blood' nightly on a regional tour. Also the venues where either Athey or Franko B. can perform are more tightly restricted than those of de Frutos – it is highly unlikely that The Place Theatre in London would have allowed the two men to 'actually' bleed on the stage. And it is unlikely that the piece would have been as favourably received by mainstream critics had the blood been 'real' – most coverage of



Franko B. focuses on the 'sensational' or 'shocking' effect of the blood whereas few critics found the stage-blood too much or too extreme in *Grass*.

Nevertheless I would argue that *Grass* explores abjection not *despite* the stage blood but *because* of its theatricality. In his analysis of the bloodiness of Franko B.'s performances David Harradine suggests that blood is never simply abject because of its 'realness' but because of its interaction with a series of allusions and significations – it is, for Harradine, "*the* most metaphorically loaded body fluid" (2000: 80).

Therefore, the signification of gay male blood (blood which flows right through the performance pieces of Franko B.) becomes legible as a kind of reference to the abject not only as blood itself, and indeed not "only" as it becomes subsumed under the infectious and abject logic of AIDS discourse, but also through a feminising association with menstrual blood, and therefore with that which Kristeva identifies as one of the most "privileged" signifiers of abjection [Kristeva, 1982: 71]. (Harradine 2000: 79-80)

Although de Frutos may not use the first of these significations of abjection – blood as blood itself breaking through the skin – *Grass*, as I will argue below, nevertheless engages with the discourses of sexuality, feminisation and infection resulting from the metaphorical use of blood. During the South Bank Show documentary de Frutos states: "I wanted to do a work where blood was there and the danger and the fear of coming into contact with this blood would be another layer" (de Frutos in SBS 31/1/99). This bleeding also is linked by de Frutos to a permeable, sexualised body: "The blood was coming from orifices in the body that were directly related to sex. Although you never saw sex on stage, you somehow had to imagine how that level of violence had been inflicted" (ibid.). This violence cites a cannibalistic desire to incorporate 'masculinity' and the choreography of the bloodied orifices through a vocabulary of twisting open legs and gasping mouths



emphasises how the homosexual male body is always already figured as polluted, corrupt and corrupting. As the duet progresses, the violence with which de Frutos hauls Watton's body around the stage increases and he frequently smears and rubs his hands across his mouth and anus, physically assaulting Watton with the 'blood'. The 'sex' becomes more like violent rape and Watton's body turns red from the repetitive attacks. The bloodied orifices in *Grass* therefore recite a link between male homosexual sex and violent pollution but do so to hyperbolically excessive levels, staging a clear rejection of the 'real' in favour of theatricality.

Although Franko B.'s work is less conventionally theatrical than either de Frutos or Athey's work in terms of location and staging, Harradine emphasises the metaphorical meanings and the chains of signification involved in Franko B.'s abject performances arguing that they are performances of 'a body' and its boundaries rather than a revelation of a 'real' body. The cultural effects of abjection comes from the various synecdochal movements whereby the body comes to represent the very culture which produces it ; "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Douglas 1966: 115). Harradine suggests that Franko B.'s bleeding body poses a threat to the processes of identification and containment and his performances disrupt the logic of abjection. The political potential of this kind of performance work lies in its staging of materiality as performance and Harradine argues that abjection has to be figured as a representative and performative repetition rather than a return to a prediscursive material or real body. Drawing on Butler, he considers how the abject body is performed alongside abject identities and how a leaking, indiscreet body also disrupts the autonomy of discrete identities.;

The performed embodiment of abjection, therefore, begins to productively guarantee the revelation of the constitutive instability and inevitable collapse of these systems of division and difference; of oppressive and restrictive



(and impossible) “identities”. My suggestion here is that the radical performance of the abject body can force a rearticulation of the exclusionary logic of abjection, not only by metaphorically enacting the frailty of that border which attempts to separate the straight from the queer...but also by foregrounding the very impossibility of maintaining these separations, these exclusions, as such. (Harradine 2000: 75)

I would argue that de Frutos’s work is precisely the kind of radical performance of abject bodies identified by Harradine. He suggests that the performativity of abjection, revealed in performance, can draw attention to the impossibility of separate and distinct identities but I would qualify this and state that the performances also reveal the impossibility of refusing completely those abject discourses that interpellate subjects into sites of debasement and violence.

De Frutos’s choreography of abjection evokes therefore the identificatory processes and foreclosures of masculine ideals. Campbell and Spackman suggest that Franko B.’s work, in opposition to Athey’s ritual refiguration of community, seeks to affirm an abject, excluded identity position – “his admittedly narcissistic deliverance erases the need for any socially affirmed identity and is instead found in the splendidly sordid isolation provided by the Abject,” (Campbell and Spackman 1998: 64). Even as Franko B. rearticulates an abjecting logic he risks being reduced to the abject and risks reifying narratives of psychologically unstable homosexuality wreaking its own destruction. These are the risks also of de Frutos’s work and, as I will discuss below, his choreography cannot be read only as transgressive of normative notions of gender and desire because he repeats these harmful terms even as he deconstructs them. Butler argues “there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very norms that enable the repetition itself” (Butler 1990b: 148).



De Frutos's spectacular staging of his body as open and bleeding, not only penetrating but penetrated, refuses the contained coherence of a 'masculine' body and explicitly moves across the boundaries of subjectivity. This produces his body as 'feminised' and abject although it does so within a hyperbolic choreographic hysteria rather than a 'realistic' return to an authentic diseased body. *Grass* mimics the very theatricality of the discourses of masculinity which cast de Frutos as the doomed homosexual. The 'falseness' of the blood prevents a return to a 'real' body and therefore disrupts any 'natural' link between homosexuality, psychosis and death. Instead the blood in *Grass* suggests that the metaphorical associations between male homosexuality, cannibalism and abjection are part of the role described by hegemonic gender, a role that cannot be refused outright but can be performed hyperbolically so as to reflexively examine its constitution.

#### 4.2b Nudity

The performance of abjection in *Grass* also comes from the fact that Watton and de Frutos are naked. As discussed in the previous chapter, male bodies both depend upon, and fail to secure, an equation between the penis and the phallus, which marks the body for potential castration. Whereas in the discussion of Bourne's *Swan Lake* I suggested that the Swan functions as a fetish partly because the feathered breeches hide the penis, in *Grass*, (and partially in *The Hypochondriac Bird* since de Frutos wears nothing under his skirt), the male bodies are naked and are revealed as open, incomplete and lacking. 'Masculine' bodies which lack phallic integrity are conventionally depicted as abject and castrated and indeed the blood in *Grass* could be read as affirming this. However much of *The Hypochondriac Bird* is given over to the exploration of the pleasures of the slippages between the bodies. The duets involve intertwining legs and arms and movement on, around and between the bodies with rhythmical thrusts. In de



Frutos's staging of sexual choreography the phallus does not separate the penetrater from the penetrated, but instead these roles are consistently interchanged and indeed, as I discuss below in relation to the kissing section of *The Hypochondriac Bird*, the performances of gendered gestures and enactments ambiguously cite desires and identifications across the binaries set up between 'having' or 'being' the phallus.

Both *Grass* and, in particular, *The Hypochondriac Bird* therefore stage the phallus as open to reappropriations which describe a pleasurable exchange of power within homosexual desire. Judith Butler's reading of the penis and phallus in both Freudian and Lacanian accounts of gender signification and bodily coherence argues that this sort of exchange can subvert discourses of 'sex' both in terms of the performative materiality of gender and in terms of the binaries of sexual pleasure. Butler suggests that whilst Freud attempts to collapse the penis into the phallus and disguise the transferable pathway of both, Lacan disavows any connection between the two which results in a troubled relation of male 'anatomy' to symbolic masculinity;

If the phallus *must* negate the penis in order to symbolise and signify in its privileged way, then the phallus is bound to the penis, not through simple identity, but through determinate negation. . . Indeed, if men are said to "have" the phallus symbolically, their anatomy is also a site marked by having lost it; the anatomical part is never commensurate with the phallus itself. (Butler 1993 : 84 - 85)

Butler is, of course, not arguing for a 'real' anatomical male body that fails to live up to symbolic ideals but instead suggests that the male anatomy is constructed through this disavowed relationship between penis and phallus. A masculine body must both have a penis and not have it, must both have the phallus and not have it; normative masculinity is caught in this performative



paradox wherein it must be castrated but must not reveal the lack that founds it. As noted in the previous chapter, Kaja Silverman suggests that this lack is projected onto the female body so that “women’s anatomical ‘wound’ is the product of an externalising displacement of masculine insufficiency, which is then biologically naturalized” (Silverman 1992: 46). Castration anxiety is therefore not a result of women’s castrated state or the mother’s threat, as Freud argues, but is a lack central to the penis-phallus relationship and hence “the castration against which the male subject protects himself through disavowal and fetishism must be primarily his own” (ibid.)

Most often this disavowal is staged through the veiling of the penis which suggests, but does not reveal, possession of the phallus. In terms of the visual representation of the male body within film, performance or painting this paradox requires that the male body is never fully embodied - the male subject must transcend the body and the castrating potential of the penis’s appearance. Richard Dyer suggests that, in terms of male pin-ups, “the penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus” (Dyer 1992: 116) and must be supplemented by various technical devices including muscular hardness and an emphasis on action - both of which are conspicuously absent from *Grass*. Emmanuel Cooper, in a study of over a hundred years of male nudity in photography documents the relative scarcity of images which display the genitals and he examines the threat of the full-frontal shot suggesting that the “significance of the genitals in revealing ‘the truth’ about men relates to how the male body functions both as phallic symbol and as a possessor of a penis” (Cooper 1995:184). Cooper reiterates that the penis can never be the phallus but, he suggests, one reason it has been excluded from ‘art’ is that it can never be ‘the penis’ either – photographs revealing “all the imperfections of the flesh were too real and literal to equal the classical model whose idealised beauty was enshrined in the sculptures of Ancient Greece and Rome...Few actual genitals have the neat precision of those depicted with such modesty on Greek and Roman statues and where the naked statue could be taken



to embody physical and spiritual perfection, the photograph appears only venal” (Cooper 1995: 8-9).

This troubled meeting in photography of the phallus or perfect penis of artistic representation with the ‘real’ penis is also to be found in naked male performance art where the modernist notions of artistic universality demand the transcendence of the particular male body to signify the phallic universal. Amelia Jones suggests that in discussions of art the penis-phallus relationship results in an emphasis upon the embodiment of masculinity as both the prerequisite for the normative representation of male artists and the castrating threat to its phallic supremacy. She identifies a spectral logic of the male body between presence and absence.

Typically, within the texts and the visual representations that comprise every art historical study, the body of the artist, by definition (until recently) male, has been veiled: both central and hidden, both represented yet, on the surface of things, ignored. Within conventional modernist art history and criticism, based on loosely Kantian models of formalist aesthetic judgment, this male body, with the prerogative assigned to it in patriarchal culture, must be both *present* and *absent*. The modernist genius must have a body that is visible as male, and yet this body must be naturalized (made invisible) in order for the rhetoric of transcendentalism to do its work successfully. . . . In Lacan’s psychoanalytic terms, the phallus must be veiled in order to avoid its exposure as mere anatomical appendage subject to removal (the body’s castration). (Jones 1998:62)

Under these modernist rules of transcendent artistic genius, male choreographers like de Frutos who are also performers would therefore face great difficulty in being considered ‘artists’. Although I argue in chapter one that dance performance does not promise full presence of the male body neither does it absent it – it ghosts the stage and in turn is haunted by the spectre of castration, what Butler calls “the



spectre of the recognition that it was always already lost” (Butler 1993:101). One of the ‘troubles with the male dancer’ that Ramsay Burt identifies is precisely the binary of feminising embodiment and masculine transcendence which led to the virtual disappearance of the male dancer from nineteenth-century concert-dance performances and his reluctant and awkward reintroduction, beginning largely with Vaslav Nijinsky, in the twentieth. Drawing on Christine Battersby’s critique of male genius, Burt suggests that the tag of ‘genius’, when applied to Nijinsky’s performances serves to recuperate certain gender transgressions within his dancing since it reinserts him into “conservative definitions of masculinity”(Burt 1995:83) similar to those outlined by Jones. If we consider however that these notions require a veiled body and that Nijinsky’s body was homoerotically unveiled (particularly at the end of *L’Après-midi d’un faune* when he simulated sex with a veil) then this recuperation cannot fully succeed. The use of ‘artist- genius’ in the context of Nijinsky and other male choreographer-performers forces a reconsideration of both the term and of the embodiment of the male artist and its relation to a phallic transcendence of the body.

The relationship between male performers and notions of ‘art’ is therefore an uneasy one, fraught with the threat of castration, and as both Burt and Jones document, it is often negotiated through fetishism and disavowal. De Frutos’s work however engages directly with it - he suggests in an interview with Libby Snape that the reasons behind his decision to explore nudity (starting in his solo works) had to do with wanting to explore vulnerability rather than sexuality (Snape 1998: 19). This vulnerability is an effect of refusing the phallic construction of the body by allowing his penis to be shown, twirling and flopping as he dances. Solo pieces such as *Meeting J* and *Sweetie J* (both 1995) deliberately drew attention to his ‘disappointing’ non-phallic penis as he brushed it with his hands or focused on it with circling hips. David Dougill’s review of *Grass* for *The Sunday Times* however reveals the pervasiveness of notions of art requiring a transcendent phallicism; “when de Frutos stamps around, with his willy bouncing like a fifth limb, I remain



sceptical about the balance in his work between art and personal exhibitionism” (Dougill 1997: 18).

It seems that in this double disappointment of not-phallus and not-penis, nakedness evokes the ‘real’ against representation, the material facts against cultural fictions, exhibitionism against art. In contrast to the abject bloodiness which is, I have argued, concerned with metaphor and signification, do the genitals on display disrupt representation? In one sense they do since for the phallus to signify the penis has to be disavowed so the appearance in de Frutos’s choreography of the penis refuses this signification. Even so we are still caught in the spectral logic since, as Butler states: “If the phallus only signifies to the extent that it is *not* the penis, and the penis is qualified as that body part that it must *not be*, then the phallus is fundamentally dependent upon the penis in order to symbolize at all” (Butler 1993: 84). Butler’s concern is to reveal the inconsistencies in this logic and propose a ‘lesbian phallus’ which parodies this relationship between penis and phallus. My concern here is to suggest that focus on nudity in de Frutos’s choreography uncovers the process whereby a concealed penis signifies phallic mastery and the coherence of a masculine body. This is not to posit a permanent, ahistorical or inescapable phallic law nor is it to argue that the unveiled penis must always disappoint, but it suggests that the penis-phallus relationship is a culturally determined performative citation, one that is therefore open to be repeated unfaithfully, either by the lesbian phallus or by the abject penis. If ‘masculinity’ within contemporary culture and artistic production requires a hidden penis then its exhibition can call into question the phallic economy of signs of sexual difference and gender performance.

The question remains however whether this is a showing of ‘the real thing’ – the real male body. Are the ‘real’ penises of de Frutos and Watton more abject than those, considered in the next chapter, painted on the dancers’ bodysuits in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*? I would argue



that the naked bodies in de Frutos's work do have a different effect to the 'nakedness' of Lea Anderson's staging of Schiele's work but that in order to theorise this we do not need to have recourse to a 'truth' about male bodies, or to 'real' penises. Butler's notion that the penis is spectral – its very appearance and discrete importance as an anatomical part is always already bound up in relation to the phallus – suggests that we only recognise it as 'real' in as much as it fails to be impressive or to signify dominant masculinity. But this is still a signification of a kind of failure of masculinity, an absence of the phallus. The penis is always already a sign within an economy of significations concerning masculinity. The difference between *Grass* and *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* in terms of penises is in the emphasis placed on materiality. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Anderson is explicitly engaged in reproduction and stylisation of surfaces whereas de Frutos's and Watton's bodies are explicitly foregrounded. The materiality in *Grass* is no less performative or theatrical simply because the men are naked – instead it reveals how the 'real' penis is produced as the disavowed evidence for the phallus and for hegemonic representations of gender and desire.

The nudity in de Frutos's work also reveals the performativity of spectatorial desire and the voyeuristic conventions of watching performance. Amelia Jones suggests that performance work which deals explicitly with the embodiment of the artist also draws attention to the embodiment of the viewers and their desires and identifications with performing bodies.

The unveiling of the body of the artist through her or his visible rendering in the act of making (or, in the case of body art, enacting) the work of art . . . entails the radical exposure of the interestedness - the erotic investments - of the interpretive process. (Jones 1998: 63)



Judith Mackrell echoes this when she suggests, in the *South Bank Show* documentary, that the audience for de Frutos are forced to reflect upon their desiring gaze.

I think that dancing is always about sex...And I think a lot of people who watch dance watch it as voyeurs – we're watching bodies ...Javier simply makes that very explicit. I think the fact he dances naked totally addresses, front on, the fact that audiences are voyeurs. (Mackrell on *SBS*, 31/1/99)

Ramsay Burt has argued that queer male dancing bodies question the Kantian notion of aesthetic judgement based on a disinterested viewing subject position. In Burt's argument performers such as Michael Clark, Mark Morris and Bill T Jones threaten to dissolve the separation between subject and object, spectator and spectacle and therefore straight and queer; "queer dancing opens up and makes space for new and sometimes subversive pleasures, breaking down or blurring the boundaries of straight discourse and proposing new subject positions" (Burt 2001: 216). This breaking and blurring the boundaries could be considered as abject in that the difference between the 'inner self' and outside is transgressed through eroticism. As I propose in chapter two, an overlap can be suggested between abjection and the eroticism in that both transgress the limits of the sovereign subject. Indeed de Frutos's insistence on the intertwining of sex and violence in *Grass* makes Bataille's link between the erotic and "violence to our inner selves" (Bataille 1986: 24), explicit in that the naked eroticism of male bodies is portrayed as perpetrating a kind of violence on these bodies – they are shown to be without phallic authority in a sexualised performance that foregrounds the abject status of homosexual bodies but also the slipperiness of spectatorship.

Steve Neale suggests that any spectacle of male bodies needed to be fetishised in order to disavow the erotics of spectatorship, "through scenes of violence and combat, but also by drawing upon the structures of fetishistic looking, by stopping



the narrative in order to recognise the pleasure of display, but displacing it from the male body as such and locating it more generally in the overall components of a highly ritualised scene” (Neale 1983: 12). Although I would suggest that the ritual of violence in *Grass* does not displace the gaze from the naked bodies of the dancers it still does work in some ways to support the hegemonic norms of visual representation in that the bodies are ‘punished’ within the narrative for their eroticism. As I discuss below, *The Hypochondriac Bird*, although less abject in terms of nudity or blood, refuses to allay the eroticism with violence or punishment and is therefore, for some critics, more unacceptable than *Grass*. The pleasures afforded by the choreographed spectacle of gay sex would seem to radically subvert spectatorial power. Nevertheless, as I argued in chapter two, the model of ‘gaze theory’ presumes a separation between identification and desire and therefore restricts a discussion of spectatorship to heterosexual terms. De Frutos’s choreography clearly works with homosexual desire, both in terms of his seduction of Watton and his seduction of the audience. The naked, abject bodies on stage disrupt heterosexual masculine norms and their emphasis on phallic mastery. *Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird* trouble conservative models of dance spectatorship which would disavow the processes of desire and identification inherent in watching male bodies dancing.

#### 4.2c Sex

*Grass* was widely praised by the dance press and garnered awards with its depiction of dark and destructive eroticism, for example, according to Judith Mackrell in the *Guardian* it was “deliberately brutal, but also one of the most unsullied portrayals of passion I’ve seen” (Mackrell 1998b: 18). *The Hypochondriac Bird*, de Frutos’s follow-up piece was not as well received and indeed faced both censorship and cancellations. The passion in this piece was perhaps less unsullied because it was less brutal. Unlike the suggestion of



offstage antics in *Grass*, in this piece there is a long section of choreographed male homosexual sex – the critics differed over the length of the simulated coitus – half an hour (Dougill and Percival), 25 minutes (Mackrell), 20 minutes (Parry) – but they concurred in their use of words to describe it as ‘self-indulgent’ (Parry) or ‘misjudged indulgence’ (Mackrell). Dougill reiterates that it was too long, and despairs that de Frutos “frequently upends and contorts himself so that we get many a goggle up his fundament” (Dougill 1998b: 26).

Ismene Brown, who found *Grass* so involving and honest, also found this piece “gratuitous” and closed to her “as a heterosexual woman” (Brown on SBS, 31/1/99). On the South Bank Show she states that whereas *Grass* was a tragedy with grand themes this piece merely emphasised “what it is that gay men do” (ibid.) which for Brown doesn’t qualify it as essential viewing. Brown states that she was unable to identify with the action or desire articulated on stage, leaving her cut off from the piece while de Frutos and Watton indulged themselves. Considering Brown’s objection that she needs to be represented in order to identify with a piece of dance, it can be argued that her objection to the “in your face” (ibid.) sexual choreography arose precisely because the piece contested the privileging of heterosexual seduction and desire in both classical ballet and mainstream contemporary dance. The reason Brown can identify “as a heterosexual woman” with these other works is because heterosexuality is performed in the duet forms and styles of gender representation, and yet transcends its particularity to be cast as the universal form of love. In the Petipa version of *Swan Lake* both the masculinity and femininity staged are normative citations which reify hegemonic norms and naturalise the heterosexuality of gender performance. In de Frutos’s cut-up take on *Swan Lake* in *The Hypochondriac Bird*, the homosexuality explored in the choreography cannot be naturalised nor universalised and it explicitly draws attention to the constitutive exclusions of normative gender; this is why it is an affront to the staunch ‘heterosexuality’ of Brown and why the ‘sex’ was deemed invalid as a form of choreography.



The fact that some critics don't want to see it, and the South Bank Show doesn't show it, recites the discursive excess that structures hegemonic fantasies about male-to-male sex. Contained in Ismene Brown's protestation that she doesn't want to be shown "what it is that gay men do" is the cultural obsession with seeing, talking and knowing about 'what gay men do' in order to do away with it. This wanting to know about so as not to know is a contingent part of the very coherent heterosexuality that Brown is looking for. De Frutos refuses this paradoxical mandate on showing homosexuality in a dramatic staging of twenty minutes of danced sex, upsetting Brown and other reviewers by not showing the 'sex' to be deadly, as in *Grass*, but pleasurable. The choreographic 'sex' cannot stand in for anything else (although as I argue below it doesn't represent 'real sex') and therefore it cannot be done away with or universalised through a metaphorical link with grand passion or doomed forbidden love – it fails to transcend the two queer bodies on stage and therefore, for Brown, it fails as dance.

Again it is important to note that de Frutos is not staging 'real' sex and the section does not attempt to simulate sex within a standard pornographic structure of foreplay, penetration and ejaculation. Richard Dyer suggests that most representations of gay sex within pornography are driven by such a narrative, which reaches its culmination in a visible orgasm/ejaculation, stressing "the importance of the visual in the way male sexuality is constructed/conceptualised" (Dyer 1992: 127). According to Dyer, gay pornography articulates a particularly phallic representation of sexuality through the emphasis on activity rather than passivity and on a teleological construction of desire which always reaches its aim at the moment of orgasm. Discourses of the 'truth' of sex are responsible for this emphasis on the 'money shot' of the ejaculating penis – "the idea that if you don't really see semen the performer could have faked it (and so you haven't had value for money" (ibid.). Dyer suggests however that pornography is not about revealing 'real' sex but about constructing notions of desire and bodies; "a form of



representation that can be the site and occasion for the production of bodily knowledge of the body.” This is not only because of the eye-opening arrangements of body parts undertaken by the performers in porn but because its effect registers in the bodies of the spectators – the audience for porn is performing desire in tandem with the images they are shown. Neither has a recourse to a natural or pre-cultural desire but instead they construct bodily enactments of discursive desires. This is why, Dyer argues, the narratives of pornography need to be reworked so as to refigure both the dominant representations of phallic masculinity and the possibilities for sexual experience and ‘bodily knowledge’.

De Frutos’s choreography builds from a short phrase of rhythmical thrusts through repetition and accumulation into a complex sequence which involves references to anal penetration, fellatio, frottage and rimming together with a wide range of other possibilities for sexual interaction between men. Rather than build to a climax, the staged sex breaks down into a play across surfaces and the multiplication of pleasures and as Josephine Leask suggests, quoting de Frutos, the sequence dissolves the boundaries of the body;

In ‘Bird’ he choreographs a love making scene lasting twenty minutes in order to show that “during the act of sex, the body no longer has limit or definition, it is dissolved into a story of sensation”. (Leask 1998: 51)

This story of sensation was clearly not one many of the critics wanted to hear, especially Brown, and for Parry it went “on and on, hoping for empathy but risking disgust or boredom” (1998b: 10). This sense of disgust (I discuss the boredom below) arises precisely because the story it tells is one of limitless, queered bodies which resist a ‘naturalistic’ pornographic narrative which drives towards orgasm and rejects the phallicised depiction of male bodies within conventional pornography.<sup>1</sup> If in *Grass* the naked male bodies are castrated by their refusal to veil the penis and signify the phallus then in *The Hypochondriac Bird* the



choreography doubly castrates them since they are desiring each other's penis – a desire which goes against the oppositional logic of sexual difference which the phallus establishes. The Lacanian demarcation of *having* the phallus and *being* the phallus as masculine and feminine positions respectively is therefore confused – neither de Frutos nor Watton *is* nor *has* the phallus exclusively nor do they assume exclusively the correlating roles played out in conventional pornography of *top* (active/penetrating/has the phallus) or *bottom* (passive/penetrated/is the phallus to reflect the top's possession of it). Their choreographic play across and between these supposedly exclusive positions does not refuse phallic difference but rather recirculates it and thereby articulates both 'sameness' and 'difference' in ways that refigure desire as mobile and performative. This does not promise liberation from notions of 'lack' or 'castration' but instead suggests that these can be subversively employed in an eroticised exchange between two men.

It is pertinent to point out that although the South Bank Show showed some of the explicit elements of *Grass*, it did not show any 'sex' from *The Hypochondriac Bird*. It does show an enactment from the start of the piece which is mainly humorous, Mackrell calls it a "very naughty phrase, [where] De Frutos times his pelvic thrusts exactly to the rhythm of a recurring scratch," (Mackrell 1998b: 18) but none of the main twenty-minute sexual exploration is shown. The very beginning of the section is screened, with de Frutos performing artificial respiration on Watton to the sound of Hawaiian folk music but it stops before he moves from blowing in Watton's mouth in a pastiche of resuscitation to giving him a 'blow-job'. When it cuts back from a talking head to the footage it is the end of the scene and Tchaikovsky's music has come back and the relationship has taken a turn for the worse with de Frutos flailing around a shuddering Watton. Considering that the director, Susan Shaw, chose to show splayed legs, flaccid penises and bloodied anuses in the first half of the documentary it seems that it wasn't prudishness that stopped her – and, after all, in *The Hypochondriac Bird* both dancers were clothed and the 'sex' was choreographed. However whereas *Grass* could be read as representing



homosexual sex as dangerously damaging, both physically and psychologically, *The Hypochondriac Bird* attempts to show it as pleasurable and utopian – as de Frutos suggests “I was defending my right to have sex as an ultimate form of paradise” (SBS 31/1/99).

During the documentary *Ismene Brown*, however, reads against this notion of ‘paradise’ suggesting instead that this piece was “too realistic” – whereas *Grass* was metaphorical in its approach to passion for Brown there was no metaphorical meaning to *The Hypochondriac Bird*. If it wasn’t gay sex *per se* (unlike Ron Athey’s work there were no erections or actual penetration) then all it was representing was gay sex and nothing more. For the critics, de Frutos’s claim to a universal ideal of paradise foundered due to the specificity of the sexual acts he depicts. His paradise is condemned as being populated by fallen bodies, abjectly opening up to penetration, spilling out across eroticised surfaces and dissolving the distance between viewer and performer. Although the imagery obliquely referenced the end of the film *From Here to Eternity*<sup>2</sup> there was no suggestion that de Frutos’s homo-paradise was inferior to, or an imperfect replica of, an original heterosexual paradise. This was surely the obscenity of the piece for Brown, and perhaps the producers of the documentary; its theatricality was not allegorical enough and all we were left with was fucking homosexuals.

Judith Mackrell echoes this lack of metaphor: “The pas de deux is generally understood to be a highly coded metaphor for sex. But in his new duet, *The Hypochondriac Bird*, Javier De Frutos strips away the usual conventions to give us as graphic an image of love-making as we’re likely to see in dance” (Mackrell 1998b: 18). Giannandrea Poesio also suggests there are no symbolic allusions to sex but sex itself; “His new work is not a stylised metaphor for apparently never-ending intercourse between two men, but an explicit enactment of it” (Poesio 1998: 51). But does this lack of metaphor result in a kind of realism? De Frutos himself throughout the documentary suggests that the work is a truthful representation of



his identity as a gay man. However I want to argue that de Frutos's use of theatricality allows his work to hyperbolically reverse the invisibility of abject homosexuality into an excessively visible play of 'sex' which reveals the performativity of desire and its role in creating 'natural' male bodies. Mark Simpson has suggested that pornographic imagery destroys the notion of natural 'sex' and this, rather than any disgust with sex, results in the moralist argument against it being shown;

The latter-day iconoclast's devotion to sex, his/her faith in its 'truth', requires that it remains private, a secret that is never told, a name that is never invoked, *because in the telling of it we might learn of its death*. The moralist's urge to smash the graven images of sex is not because he/she considers that they sin against sex by offering an imperfect copy of it, but rather because they know well enough that these images represent all too truly 'sex' and thus threaten to reveal that there is no such thing. (Simpson 1994: 145)

Rather than exposing 'real' gay sex de Frutos's choreography reveals that all sex is choreographed – and by correlation all sexual identities are formed around performances, rather than expressions, of desire. The obscenity of *The Hypochondriac Bird* wasn't simply therefore that there were no metaphors for universal tragedy contained in the gay 'sex' but also, and importantly, de Frutos dared to announce the death of 'sex' by making it boring. Judith Mackrell was typical of many reviewers when she stated:

the work disastrously retreats up its own backside, for an apotheosis that's essentially a 25-minute sexual marathon. De Frutos simply runs out of moves. His relentless recycling of the same actions would be numbing even if it were real sex, and we were doing it. Watching it is a chore. (1998b: 18)



The section is such 'a chore' because it neither seduces the audience with a pornographic narrative nor promises to represent 'real' sex – indeed it is clearly a theatrical rendition or a 'copy' but it is without 'original' in that its choreography doesn't attempt to realistically simulate sex acts. The repetitive structure of the section makes the choreography almost formalist in its attention to the accumulation of positions, shapes and rhythms rather than the development of narrative and the dancing is almost minimalist in its repetitiveness. This 'boring' attention to form disrupts the eroticism of the explicit positions and breaks with any naturalistic notion that it could fully represent 'sex'. This doesn't leave 'sex' out of the signifying process, as the unrepresentable referent but instead emphasises the impossibility of ever fully representing 'sex' because 'it' doesn't exist outside of its representations or enactments. Shoshana Felman has argued that the suggestion of the performativity of 'sex' is the "most scandalous of all propositions: The sexual act, in the speaking being, might be only a speech act" (Felman 1983: 111). Similarly de Frutos stages a scandalous proposition: the sex act is only a performative dance. Through this formalised rendition of sex, de Frutos's choreography reveals its performativity and rejects the possibility of 'natural' desires and pleasures and therefore the correlative abjection of all those that are 'unnatural' or not 'the real thing.'

#### 4.3 Abject Identifications

As a final part of the exploration of abjection I want to turn to examine how de Frutos's choreography stages abject identities and question whether his repeated playing out of murderous, feminised homosexuals serves to disrupt or confirm normative notions of 'coherent' masculine identities. Judith Butler suggests that "identity always requires precisely that which it cannot abide," (Butler 1993: 188). If, as I have argued, hegemonic representations of masculinity cannot abide the 'feminized fag' yet still requires it in order to shore up the boundaries of



heterosexual masculinity, then what effect is there of de Frutos's enactment of this role? Does his appearance, as the 'outside' of conventional male bodies (however impossible these may be), simply enact the abject logic which has cast homosexuality as a 'failed' masculinity and heterosexuality as 'successful'? In one sense the 'success' and 'coherence' of masculinity depends upon the melancholic disavowal of identifications with figures such as those performed by de Frutos – he remains preserved as the homosexual spectre which haunts the site of 'masculinity' and his appearance may confirm that the failure, discontinuity and death that mark his body is indeed in and of *his* body rather than a discursive production of dominant notions of what it is to be a male body.

The discussion of de Frutos's 'characters' as autobiographical (including by de Frutos himself) closes down the question of how these are citations of sites of injury that have interpellated him into the abject role of the feminine homosexual. Rather than reduce these roles to expressions of the 'true' de Frutos, his interior psychological landscape or his emotional history, I argue that they can be considered as hyperbolic occupations that repeat these abject discourses but in doing so reveal them to be dependent on reiteration and repetition. Although de Frutos is compelled to repeat his abjection it can never be repeated faithfully and therefore it can be refigured. If the abject logic which attempts to contain masculinity within a legible 'male' body can never be successful (since it always needs to be repeated) then this failure gives rise to opportunities to rework the devalued figures of abjection and their position as the 'outside' of masculinity. I want to suggest that de Frutos's abject performance exposes the production of the feminized fag as a violent, melancholic process of citation which can be repeated in such a way as to critique the very abjection which founds it within dominant representation. Judith Butler suggests that such resistance can operate only within hegemonic representation but can nevertheless serve to rework the terms of the heterosexual symbolic.



If the figures of homosexualized abjection *must* be repudiated for sexed positions to be assumed, then the return of those figures as sites of erotic cathexis will refigure the domain of contested positionalities within the symbolic. Insofar as any *position* is secured through differentiation, none of these positions would exist in simple opposition to normative heterosexuality. On the contrary, they would refigure, redistribute, and resignify the constituents of that symbolic and, in this sense, constitute a subversive rearticulation of that symbolic. (Butler 1993: 109 emphasis in original)

De Frutos also engages with discourses of exoticism, exploring the racialised other which is the seductive opposite of the white heterosexual male. In the adoption of these characters, de Frutos investigates the interpellation of his body as racially different, suggesting that discourses of 'race', gender and sexuality interlock at the site of performative subjectivity. Again this serves to resignify the repudiated symbolism of the abject and it suggests that there can be a subversive pleasure in playing out the exotic effeminate role.

#### 4.3a Effeminacy

One of the main figures of homosexual abjection is, as Butler suggests, the "feminized fag," (1993: 103). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that towards this figure there is a culturally pervasive "effeminophobia" <sup>3</sup>(Sedgwick 1994: 157) which is manifest within psychological discourse (the subject of her particular study) but also, maybe surprisingly, within gay culture. Sedgwick cites as causes for this a political desire to separate gender and sexuality and the necessity of refusing the notion that a man desiring another man has to identify as a woman in order to remain within a heterosexual frame of desire. Esther Newton, writing in 1979, noted that "there has been an enormous struggle within the gay male community to



come to terms with the stigma of effeminacy,” (Newton 1979: xiii) and she documents the rise of the macho clone culture which has arguably dominated gay male self-representation ever since. Richard Dyer notes a degree of political ambiguity in the gay adoption of signs of masculinity in terms of the investment in conventional modes of ‘male power’.

There is profound ambivalence in this development. I am not at all clear in my own mind how gay men do actually relate to this masculinization. It can be taken straight – as a worship of the signs of male power, as an attempt to prove ‘I may be queer but I’m still a man’. But it *can* be taken ironically and reflexively too... We have to try to understand the new macho look in relation to all the frames of reference, reactionary and subversive, that can inform it. (Dyer 1992: 166)

Nevertheless this focus on the eroticisation of signs of ‘maleness’ within gay culture (or, at least, mainstream Anglo-US gay culture) has resulted in the rejection of effeminacy both as desirable or as a ‘positive’ image for gay men. This repudiation of the feminised fag is therefore doubly abject – which, according to Sedgwick, “leaves the effeminate boy once more in the position of the haunting abject – this time the haunting abject of gay thought itself” (1994:157).<sup>4</sup> As I explored in the previous chapter, Matthew Bourne has on many occasions expressed his antipathy towards the haunting abject of effeminacy. One of the reasons why Bourne’s *Swan Lake* has such a large gay following is because of the fetishised and commodified ‘masculinity’ of the swans and the disavowal of any trace of effeminacy. Conversely, de Frutos suggests that *Grass* was not very popular with gay audiences (in Snape 1998:21) – as I argue below, de Frutos plays out the role of the effeminate in both this piece and *The Hypochondriac Bird*. Although de Frutos found the lack of gay support a “major surprise” (ibid.) it seems to concur with Sedgwick’s assertion that the effeminate male figure is the haunting abject of gay thought. David Gere continues with a similar argument in his analysis



of a dance piece by American choreographer Joe Goode entitled *29 Effeminate Gestures*, (1987).

Having internalized the prejudice in American culture at large against effeminate boys and adult men, gay men – the very men who might be expected to embrace the coded meanings, the identification with oppressed women, the struggle to gain power – instead practice open abhorrence of any trace of their own effeminacy. Thus the performance of effeminacy requires even more bravery within the gay community than outside it. (Gere 2001: 369-370)

Gere's analysis of Goode's performance focuses on the policing of 'male' behaviour and the abjection incurred if the boundaries proscribing 'feminine' gestures are transgressed. Gere suggests that the performance of effeminacy, both within the gay community and to wider audiences, is a political act of heroism, and it is worth considering his argument here since, I will argue, many of his conclusions can be applied to de Frutos's performances. However I also will suggest that Gere's emphasis on performing effeminacy as a political act of resistance cannot be easily assimilated into a reading of de Frutos's occupation of the 'feminized fag' abject figure.

Gere suggests three 'basic' rules of 'masculine' deportment; the arms when used should be straight and when not used should be tightly crossed or held behind the back – "curves should be avoided at all costs" (2001: 351), fingers are held inwards, in a fist rather than curled out and legs should be broadly crossed or held in a wide stance (the knees are never held together). Within these 'basics' established by Gere there is a suggested link between a tight and restricted display of the body and a control of its boundaries. The iconographic masculine stance is wide to suggest, but never reveal, the male genitals and the chest and arms are held hard to suggest strength and power. 'Softness' is refused and "to be



physically expressive is forbidden" (ibid.). Gere suggests, with reference to Foucault's notion that "discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile bodies'" (Foucault 1991: 138) that these regulations of masculine posture can be considered as a disciplinary production of bodies, a discursive law internalised as boys grow up. The spectre of effeminacy however haunts these 'basics' as the monstrous abject future of a boy who would break these conventions.

An 'effeminate' performance is therefore a use of a male body which directly contravenes these basics – as Gere argues 'effeminacy' suggests that the body becomes 'like a woman' but the term 'effeminate' can never be used to describe a female performance. A woman being 'effeminate' is a woman performing her gender correctly and therefore invisibly. 'Effeminate' is a derogatory term that makes visible the failure of a masculine performance – it does not suggest that the performer becomes, "equivalent to the female but is reserved, rather, for the male rendered 'not-male'" (Gere 2001: 358). Gere therefore considers the various 'gestures' of Joe Goode's choreography which render him 'not-male' and which visibly mark his body as a failure, as the abject of the disciplinary male body. I will discuss them here as a means of exploring how de Frutos's body is likewise marked as failing to be male, as performing gender incorrectly and therefore as abject.

Gere suggests the primary act of effeminacy, both in Goode's choreography and also within disciplines of the body, is to confuse pectoral muscles with breasts. Goode traces breasts on his body with his hands and therefore performs a biological travesty, replacing the hard masculine pecs with soft shapely breasts, thereby "demonstrating the radical possibilities for reshaping and regendering the body that result from the conscious performance of gender" (Gere 2001: 354). This gesture is often performed by de Frutos in *Grass*, with his curving expressive fingers circling his chest to emphasise its softness rather than strength. *The Hypochondriac Bird* sees this breast-pectoral confusion amplified in the scene



where de Frutos is seducing Watton. During a section of pecking kisses to the tempo of music from Act II of *Swan Lake*, de Frutos turns his attention to Watton's pectorals – again on tempo, he curves his hands around, fondles and caresses Watton's 'breasts' and nipples. Facing the audience with a mischievous grin, his hands move to cup Watton's pecs and as the violins are plucked de Frutos shakes Watton's breasts at the audience. On one level this is a parody of a heterosexual male obsession with breasts which renders the whole seduction comical – Watton is called into the role of a busty temptress and he is effeminised by de Frutos's 'confusion' of breast and pec. De Frutos is perhaps deconstructing this icon of feminine performance – as Gere suggests, "effeminate seduction grabs hold of the forces of attraction that undergird the patriarchal order and radically unsteadies them" (Gere 2001: 371). There is however also a degree of ambiguity in that these gestures take place as part of a seduction suggesting that the effeminate de Frutos desires the 'femininity' of Watton's body. In terms of the performance of gender and desire therefore we are watching a lesbian seduction performed by two male bodies. This radically unsettles the naturalness of a line of continuity through 'sex', gender performance and desire. The performed blurring of breast and pec can unsettle the distinction between 'male' and 'female' and find similarity and correlation at the level of anatomy where difference should be unambiguously read. De Frutos's choreography suggests that desire and bodily pleasure need not be generated through difference or lack and, furthermore, that the playing out of 'femininity' on 'male' bodies can be a source of playful eroticism rather than abjection or failure. Through gestures such as the fondling of the 'breasts', soft and seductive bodies are performed in the place of hard, controlled bodies and de Frutos suggests that gay desire need not be based in a fetishisation of masculinity but in a mutual performance of effeminacy which troubles the distinction between biological 'sex' and performed gender.

Another key locale of effeminacy that Gere locates is the fingers, hands and wrists – they are limp, soft and expressive. The broken wrist is "a movement largely



coded in the West to mean gay” (Gere 2001: 357), and Goode augments this in a waving gesture with fluttering fingers which Gere takes to be an insurrectionary gesture.

However, of all the component parts of this gesture, the mannerism of the fluttering fingers is the most subversive. Masculine fingers never flutter; they are open, flat unarticulated. Masculine fingers are stiff. The mobile fingers, then, serve as a gesture of resistance, as powerful as the middle finger when held erect. In their own blithe way these fingers speak the words *fuck you*. (Gere 2001: 357-358)

Richard Dyer also attributes to this area of the body a particularly charged revolutionary effeminate potential – “You know those clenched fists you get on political badges (including women’s liberation and GLF)? Well why shouldn’t it be a clenched fist on a limp wrist? Divine” (Dyer 1992 : 146). De Frutos’s fingers are defiantly never still, stiff or unarticulated – indeed his choreographic style is marked by an expressivity in the hands but this is not unequivocally transgressive. Whereas Goode isolates the gestures and performs them self- reflexively in order to examine the political investments in bodily presentation, de Frutos uses gestures as part of his performance of a character and therefore they risk being naturalised as expressive of that character’s true interior self. Goode does not use gestures to tell a story but to reveal an ideology whereas de Frutos integrates gestures into a narrative, albeit a fractured and disturbing one, which is often read by critics as semi-autobiographical (and therefore ‘real’). Whether unfurling delicately outwards or grasping desperately like claws, his fingers are constantly operating as excessive signifiers of effeminacy but their ‘messages’ are not always politically ‘positive’ in the meaning used by Gere and Dyer. In *Grass*, particularly in the second half, his expressive hands slap and beat Watton, claw at his body or stab at the naked flesh and de Frutos uses them to smear ‘blood’ from his anus onto Watton’s back. As the music from *Madama Butterfly* reaches a climax his hands



hover insistently around his face, wiping the tears from his eyes, the snot from his nose and the 'blood' from his mouth to emphasise the extreme, open, leaking abjection of his body. When his arms flail around him, (using the curves 'forbidden' in Gere's basics of masculine posture) the limp wrists are not gestures of resistance but flourishes of dejection and desperation; de Frutos uses his hands in *Grass* to accent his excessive, hysterical choreography which delineates a murderous, doomed, effeminate, homosexual character consumed by a deadly passion.

In *The Hypochondriac Bird* the use of his fingers is lighter and more decorative, and indeed they flutter around Watton – Judith Mackrell draws attention to the moment "when De Frutos translates Odette's fluttering footwork into the tremulous quivering of his fingers, thrust into Watton's fly" (Mackrell 1998b: 18). Here, perhaps, de Frutos's hands have more of the 'subversive' quality of Goode's gestures in that they signal desire, temptation and a delight in the tactile exploration of the private areas of Watton's body. The tremulous, quivering fingers communicate in a kind of sign language which reads perhaps not, as Gere would suggest, *fuck you* but unmistakably *fuck me*. Nevertheless following the twenty minute section of choreographed sex which follows, the hands are used to reject Watton as they reach towards him and then push him away, the arms slicing expressive arcs as de Frutos stamps and twirls frantically around a shuddering Watton. The final image is of the couple breaking their clasped hands and as Watton walks away de Frutos's finger's twitch desperately, reaching with longing after the man he has rejected. The privileged gesture of effeminacy, the expressive hand, is therefore turned to signal emotional and psychological instability and the disappointment of the impossibility of homosexual desire.

Contrary to this rather depressing portrayal of effeminacy as dooming a body to failure and abjection, Gere states that Goode's deconstructive performance of effeminacy radically reconfigures the body as the site where arbitrary gestures



construct the notion of a true gender and a biological 'sex'. Goode's hyperbolic citation of these disciplinary gestures reworks the effeminate man into "a cultural abolitionist whose goal is nothing less than to set us free from the tyranny of gender" (Gere 2001: 372). Citing Judith Butler, Gere argues that 'effeminacy' should be considered alongside 'queer' as a term of abuse open for reworking – it interpellates subjects into a particular site of injury but "it can also become a bulwark of resistance, an insult absorbed and reconfigured as a badge of honor" (Gere 2001: 376). The abject characters performed in de Frutos's work however are not as straightforwardly resistant as this and, unlike Goode, de Frutos does not promise 'freedom from the tyranny of gender'. Nevertheless there are several ways in which his work can be considered as simultaneously reifying and reconfiguring the disciplinary production of gendered bodies through his performance of abject effeminate characters.

#### 4.3b Hysterical Characterisation.

There are a range of "Javier de Frutos" characters who are repeated in both the pieces under discussion here but who also appear in other works. The persistence of these effeminate characters often leads to readings of the work as autobiographic-choreography – Neil Cooper in *The Times* suggests that *Grass* reveals de Frutos's "secret self" (1997: 40) and argues that "his own struggles to recognise and come to terms with himself as an artist are as much a part of a work as of his life" (ibid.) Ismene Brown proposes that de Frutos has a political agenda based in forcing an unwilling audience to face the truth about his real life.

Javier's work is tremendously autobiographical, you're always aware of that, and, very much, his desire is to show you as far as possible the realities that he feels about his life as a homosexual, as an isolated man, as a man who feels that society doesn't want to know what he does. He wants to say "I'm



real, I'm equal, see me, see me, and accept me," and this is, I think, where he gets the material for his work. Which is why it is so hard to look at sometimes because it's so 'in your face'. (Brown on SBS 31/1/99)

Brown therefore ascribes to the performances of de Frutos a rather desperate realism as his characters attempt to assert a visibility for their version of reality, based on Brown's idea that the 'truth' of homosexuality is isolation and repression. The effect of de Frutos's performance of effeminacy is rendered by both Brown and Cooper as an expression of the abjection which is part of the reality of de Frutos's life as a gay man. Neither Cooper nor Brown therefore allow for any reflexivity in de Frutos's adoption of the feminised abject – it is simply the truth of his identity, revealed to us through expressive choreography. De Frutos's own discussions of his work during the *South Bank Show* also suggest that his work is explicitly linked with his life-experiences and he is both 'honest' and 'brave' in his choreographic self-depiction. Josephine Leask has however suggested that de Frutos's characters are ambiguous – both expressive yet performative, intense yet discontinuous and their 'message' is far more to do with physical excess than 'in your face' realism.

Such characters are created by his eclectic gestural movement style which he puts on like different costumes, and will play until they seem real. At times his performance reaches such heights of feverish intensity that he appears genuinely terrified by his own erotic urges. Like a true schizophrenic who speaks in a range of tongues, so his movement style corresponds, ranging from depicting a neurotic violent psychopath to luxuriating lover. He might move his upper torso in a rigid clockwork style, creating angry angular lines, running in different directions repeating movements like a cartoon character, followed by grand swirling spins, flamenco stamping or teasing pelvic undulations. But he does not



overcharacterise and frequently performs neutralising abstract movement which is simply an expression of dancing for its own sake. (Leask 1998: 48)

As Leask notes these characters are “played until they seem real” but this ‘realness’ is often ‘neutralised’ by the attention given to formal patterns of movement and to passages of choreography which explore the repetition of movement and the accumulation of gestures (such as the ‘sex’ section discussed above). Leask draws a comparison with schizophrenia but de Frutos’s performance has more similarities with hysteria in that these multiple roles are performed in order to frustrate the reading of a singular expressive body. Fuss argues that hysteria is “a one-woman show in which the hysteric plays all the roles” (Fuss 1995: 115) and this swirl of symptomatic displays stages other bodies and exposes the fluidity of identifications. The eclecticism and contrary physicality identified by Leask also draw upon symptoms of hysteria and the duplicity of de Frutos’s performance again performs parallels with feminine bodily identifications.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, hysteria was certainly perceived as an illness, but an illness inseparable from a certain way of behaving badly, one which was (and largely still is) perceived as feminine. While the core clinical picture – of changeable physical symptoms having no obvious organic root cause – remained in place, flirtatiousness, deceitfulness, exaggerated gestures, unseemly displays of emotion, excessive wants or dislikes, overt sexual behaviour or the ostentatious refusal of sex all became part of a proliferation of discourses, medical and popular, surrounding the hysteric. (Borossa 2001: 12)

In the next chapter I explore how Lea Anderson’s attention to the surface reproduction of iconographies of multiplied hysterical identities disrupts the inner/outer distinction of expressive models of gender. There are passages within both *Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird* however where the intensity of de



Frutos's performance (as differing from the blankness of *The Featherstonehaughs*) becomes easy to read as an expression of an internal psychological compulsion. This expressivity is however, as Leask points out, framed by sections of 'pure dance' which draw attention to their own choreographic construction and the very mutability of the excessive identifications also disrupts the development of character or narrative. The hysterical structure of de Frutos's work therefore requires that the audience consider how expressivity is a formal process of choreography – the characters are performed through an accumulation of movements, styles and gestures which suggest some 'realness' but in doing so reveal how this reality is an effect of the performance and not the underlying substance on which it is based. De Frutos may, as a gay man, have direct experience of the abjection of the effeminate man but his choreography does not simply express this through auto-choreographical narrative. Rather his formalised adoption and repetitive citation of this role explores its performative constitution and examines how it comes to figure as the abjected spectre haunting coherent masculine bodies.

Jamie Watton, too, has a range of characters – mostly he is the 'straight man' to de Frutos's characters –in terms of being both the foil of his comedy and the heterosexual object of his queer desire. His 'masculine' style of performance offers a contrast to the effeminacy of de Frutos but it is figured as no more 'natural' or expressive and it is queered both by desire and action. In *Grass*, Watton spends most of the first half watching, motionless, with weight on one hip and back to the audience, before participating in the skipping games around the circle of light, swapping affiliation between Naderi and de Frutos with no discernible interest or desire for either. When de Frutos kisses Watton he responds but his arms are held down by de Frutos – his main function is to remain passive, and choreographically underplayed, while de Frutos ensnares him with his excessive performance. In the second half of *Grass* Watton is more active, but only just, and more often he seems a heavy, lifeless body that de Frutos pulls and pushes around, manipulating



him into sexual movements that echo the bloody passion we are to imagine having taken place. As the character of de Frutos's fury and self-pity mounts, Watton's slips away and we see him hauled like a carcass, beaten so that his back becomes red, and finally he lies, presumably 'dead' while de Frutos stands trembling, with shaking arms signalling an obscure lament of horror and regret.

In *The Hypochondriac Bird*, the difference between Watton and de Frutos is more pronounced – Watton is wearing a suit, de Frutos a skirt – and again Watton's performance is more controlled, less fluid or light. He stands with hands in his pockets vaguely amused as de Frutos rummages around in the flies of his trousers and when de Frutos performs the section of pecking kisses to Odette's duet music from Act II of *Swan Lake*, Watton allows it to happen but does not instigate any action. The twenty minute section of sexual choreography is really the only place where the two men share a similar style of performance – their 'characters' dissolve to the sounds of waves against a shore. When Watton is 'rejected' by de Frutos he breaks down but with shudders and stuttering falls rather than the sweeping circles and hysterical limbs of de Frutos.

Pary Naderi in *Grass* also plays a key character – in the first half she is de Frutos's rival for the attention of Watton, in the second she is "consigned to endless ghostly arm-waving behind a gauze" (Dougill 1997: 18). On the *South Bank Show* she is rarely seen – when they show the second half of *Grass* the focus is on the two men and you are only able to perceive her spectral figure in rare glimpses.

Nevertheless I would argue that she is important to the trajectory of the events on stage – she is 'put to death' by de Frutos's jealous stamps at the close of the first half, expelled from the circle of light and rendered as the 'outside' to their homosexual desire. This could be read as a crude rendering of her, as symbolising Woman, as not represented within the economies of homosexual signification – akin to Brown's idea that 'what gay men do' necessarily excludes heterosexual women. But her haunting of the scene suggests that this expulsion is



not complete, as the figure abjected from homosexual identity she returns as “a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge” (Butler 1993: 3).

Naderi is not simply a reminder of heterosexual desire, or of femininity, but an incursion of disavowed identifications into the scene of male homosexuality. In terms of this argument de Frutos can only have Watton, they can only assume the coherent identity of ‘gay men’ if they repudiate Naderi as either an identification or an object of desire. Yet this repudiation *is* an identification with the disavowal of desire and her performance at the back of the stage reveals that any assumption of a coherent identity ‘position’ requires other abject ‘non-positions’ to be both absent and present: absent so as not to be identified with but present so as to read a difference. In chapter three I suggested that Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake* is haunted by the disavowed ballerina because he refuses to acknowledge any identification between her and his Swan character. In, de Frutos’s reworking of *Swan Lake*, in *The Hypochondriac Bird*, he very clearly makes identifications with the seductive ballerina, and his performance of masculinity is not fetishised so as to ward off her presence within the score. Through the figure of Naderi in *Grass*, de Frutos actively engages with the ghosts produced by the violent repudiations that found any attempt at maintaining a stable identity. Although most of the discussion within this thesis focuses around the expulsion of male homosexuality from dominant masculine norms it is clear that the articulation of a homosexual identity also requires constituent repudiations, as suggested by Butler:

For a gay or lesbian identity position to sustain its appearance as coherent, heterosexuality must remain in that rejected and repudiated place.

Paradoxically, its heterosexual *remains* must be *sustained* precisely through insisting on the seamless coherence of a specifically gay identity. (Butler 1997b: 149 emphasis in original)



Naderi's performance re-enacts the violence of rejection and explicitly engages with the haunting of desire by its disavowed attachments but de Frutos's characters are not seamless or coherent and the apparition of Naderi interrupts what is already a fragmented representation of homosexuality and masculinity. Her presence/absence on the stage draws attention to the various repudiations being played out and the failure of subjectivity to fully exorcise the ghosts of the abject.

#### 4.3c Exoticism

De Frutos's performance of the effeminate characters is made more complex, and more reflexive, in the intersection with notions of gender as 'racialised' and of 'race' as gendered. In reviews of both pieces under discussion de Frutos is both effeminised and racially othered by the critics – in *The Hypochondriac Bird* for Mackrell he is “by turns a delicately sinuous Arabic dancer and a tragic Swan Queen” (1998b: 18) and for Parry he is “an exotic houri trying to turn on a seemingly proper English gent” (1998b: 10). This identification by the critics marks de Frutos as doubly abject; both non-white and non-masculine. This therefore repeats fantasies and fears of the exotic other who possesses an uncivilised, but also unnatural, sexuality. Despite the fact that de Frutos was born in Venezuela, both critics link his character with ‘the East’ – a dancer from Arabia or a houri from Persia. Amy Koritz has analysed the reception of performances in 1908 of *The Vision of Salome* by Maud Allen to suggest that discourses of Orientalism combined with notions of female sexuality to create a notion of the erotic spectacle of the Eastern dancer which “embodied anxieties about women and Orientals while also affirming the mastery of both by a Western and male-defined truth” (Koritz 1997: 138). Whilst it is true that both Mackrell and Parry are, to some extent, uncritically repeating these discourses, I want to examine how de Frutos is also exploring the effeminate exotic with recourse to these stereotypes.



The characters that de Frutos performs in both *Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird* share certain similarities in that there is no attempt to 'pass', either as white or as straight, but instead they cite the exotic other. This is most pronounced in *The Hypochondriac Bird* through his floral skirt and also through the allusions to Hawaii but also suggested in *Grass* where he is identified with the character Butterfly from Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* which is used as the score. His performances in both pieces also directly reference flamenco through percussive defiant stamps, shouts, twirling arms and expressive fingers.<sup>5</sup> In both works this multicultural exoticism marks him as a deviant, uncivilised Other bringing ruin to the heterosexual "English gent" of Watton through aberrant sexual desire. The marked contrast in their movements suggest that the 'Englishness' of Watton requires heavy, precise movements and a relaxed certainty of superiority and the 'oriental' requires full bodied, sexualised movements with a flighty lightness and devious unpredictability.

Koritz, writing about performance in the first decade of the twentieth century, suggests that "the Orientalist racial stereotypes commonly deployed in the service of imperialist policies worked in concert with gender stereotypes that underwrote definitions of the English "national character." By representing the English to themselves as vigorous, manly, direct, and so forth, the discourse of nationalism was couched in a vocabulary that explicitly excluded women" (Koritz 1997: 134-135). The representation of the Orient, as a result, was feminised – the passive, submissive yet seductive woman to be conquered by the English (or indeed the American in *Madama Butterfly*). De Frutos, choreographing in the last decade of the twentieth century, is revisiting these Imperialist dichotomies of race and gender but doing so explicitly in order to trouble them. Maude Allan could portray the sexualised Oriental woman without disturbing the stereotype; "her dance conveyed the 'truth' about this Other by distilling its presumed essence or spirit, while on the other hand, the unknowability of the East remained inviolate, since Allan remained



a Westerner” (Koritz 1997: 147). De Frutos’s choreography does not claim to be representing the ‘truth’ either about the exotic other or about his experience instead it investigates the cultural production of ‘race’ and its intersection with discourses of gender and sexuality.

De Frutos’s hysterical performance of obsessive and excessive bodily ‘expression’ also revisits and re-examines the collapse of ‘race’, gender and pathology. As Julia Borossa has argued, hysterical discourse of the early twentieth century treated male patients as either racially ambiguous or homosexual. In order to account for the display of ‘feminine’ gestures on a ‘male’ body there had to be discerned some characteristic which would mark them apart from the white Western patriarch.

So potential victims would be described as effeminate, or as belonging to certain ‘suspect’ racial groups such as Jews or Arabs. The language of hereditary taints and medical pathology would come into play here.

Moreover, some of these men were exemplary of a type which was just emerging within medical discourses [i.e. homosexuals]. (Borossa 2001: 57-58)

The hysterical intensity of de Frutos’s performance cites a racialised feminine expressivity and plays on suspicions of mixed-heritage and deviant sexual desire. Dancing the inutterable discourse of hysteria across his body as a performative occupation of these abject sites of illness and pollution, de Frutos engages hyperbolically theatrical expressive movements which do not reveal the inner truth of his identity but its constitution through disavowed spectacles of otherness. Judith Butler analyses the film *Paris is Burning* (1991) by Jennie Livingston, which documents drag balls in Harlem, as explicitly examining the play of ‘race’, class, sexuality and gender in the constitution of a ‘real’ subject. The performers (or ‘walkers’ as they are known) are mainly black and Latino gay men who perform in



various categories drawn from both white and black, male and female, straight and gay cultural idioms. The aim of the performances is to be 'real', to pass as an authentic imitation of someone who belongs to that category.

"Realness" is not exactly a category in which one competes; it is a standard that is used to judge any given performance within the established categories. And yet what determines the effect of realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect. This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of a racial and class norm, a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates. (Butler 1993: 129)

This figurative 'real' norm is therefore something of an impossible spectre which is invoked by the performance but which is impossible to materialise fully. As I have argued above with reference to Franko B and Ron Athey, 'realness' is always a reproduction of 'realness' and a disavowal of the process of reading. The walkers and the judges of the balls establish 'reading' as the undoing of 'realness', if they 'read' a performance then it is not 'real' and a naturalised assumption of a racialised sexual identity is disrupted.

For "reading" means taking someone down, exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance, insulting or deriding someone. For a performance to work, then, means that a reading is no longer possible, or that a reading, an interpretation, appears to be kind of transparent seeing, where what appears and how it is "read" coincide. (Butler 1993: 129).

De Frutos's assumption of racialised effeminate characters does not produce this smooth coincidence between the body and the ideal and therefore his characters,



unlike the walkers at the ball, invite reading. The hysterical production of the exotic feminine in both *Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird* hyperbolically plays out these ideals and the interplay of excessive drama with formalist choreography situates these ideals as quotations which are open for resignification. When de Frutos identifies with the self-destructive fragility of Butterfly or the allure of a hula-hula dancer it is not so as to 'pass' or be 'real' like the walkers of the balls but to reveal the constructed nature of these idealised notions of the erotic feminine. Whereas his playing out of the murderous homosexual often suggests that there is an internal identity being expressed through the choreography, the exotic other is played at a distance with a sense of camp parody.

Unlike Maud Allen, however, de Frutos is neither 'a Westerner' nor a woman. Therefore although we are able to read these characters as assumed or performed, the very Otherness of de Frutos becomes part of this performance of exoticism. His queer Latino body is read through, rather than underneath or as the truth behind, these stereotypes and through his recirculation of colonialist and medical discourses of hysteria, sexuality, gender and 'race'. The gap between him and the exotic stereotype therefore is neither clear nor stable and, as the remarks from the critics attest, de Frutos's body is always already interpellated into the role of the racialised Other. The performance therefore reveals the complex discursive overlaps of 'race', sexuality and gender in the constitution of a subject and it highlights their interdependency but it also importantly attests to the possibility of repeating them in ways which reconfigure their relationship. As Homi Bhabha has suggested, the citation of stereotypes of nation and race examines "the regulation and negotiation of those social identities that are continually, contingently 'opening out', remarking the boundaries, exposing and endangering, *in the performative moment*, any possibility of a singular, sovereign difference – be it class, gender, or race" (Bhabha 1994: 212 emphasis in original).



De Frutos's negotiation of cultural ideals and stereotypes is choreographically rendered citational and performative, as constructed through acts and gestures which parody both the feminine East and the masculine West but which also refigure the boundaries of the erotic, exotic Other. Again the choreography attends to the abject realm of the 'outside' – the identifications which need to be disavowed for a straight white masculine subjectivity to be performed - and again it suggests that these abject figures haunt the coherence of any identity and offer ways of crossing, blurring and reworking these boundaries in order to open up the performance of desire and sexuality.

#### 4.4 Conclusions

In this chapter I have identified various discourses concerning abjection, particularly those of realism and theatricality, as being both repeated and reworked in the choreography of Javier de Frutos. *Grass* explores the various metaphorical meanings of bleeding male bodies and refuses the mandate to veil the penis in order to portray phallic masculinity. *The Hypochondriac Bird* stages a formal choreography of sex in order to reveal the performativity of desire and the eroticised investments in dancing bodies. Both pieces engage with the abject 'feminised fag' character and explore the intersection of notions of 'race', gender and sexuality.

De Frutos's occupation and theatricalisation of abjection reveals the subversive potential of a hyperbolic engagement with melancholia – the choreography deconstructs the characters it stages, showing them to be recitations of the discursive 'outside' of white male heterosexuality. The choreography does not emerge however simply on the other side of these norms nor does it offer resistance from a coherent identity position in direct opposition to hegemonic gender. Rather de Frutos's work can be read as allegorising the violent process of



disavowal and the cultural prohibition on the mourning of homosexual attachments. It details both the impossibility of stable identity and the places where it fails to succeed and hence falls towards death. As such the choreography risks being naturalised as expressing an autobiographical psychosis rather than a recitation and refiguring of the casting of the homosexual as always already ill. I have argued that the reduction of de Frutos's work to a kind of realism works in the service of the discursive foreclosure of homosexuality which forms the basis of hegemonic gender norms. The hysteria of de Frutos's work adopts and repeats these discourses but does so excessively thereby exposing these norms as temporally constituted through citation thus rendering the abject, feminized fag as productive rather than expressive of the 'truth' of homosexuality. Judith Butler's notion of 'theatrical rage' identifies a kind of political strategy which hyperbolically engages with the violence of abjection and melancholia but turns this violence against itself in acts of excessive theatricality. It "deploys a hyperbolic display of death and injury to overwhelm the epistemic resistance to AIDS and to the graphics of suffering, or a hyperbolic display of kissing to shatter the epistemic blindness to an increasingly graphic and public homosexuality" (Butler 1993: 233).

*Grass* deploys a hyperbolic display of death as de Frutos is forced to kill the object of his desire, and *The Hypochondriac Bird* deploys a hyperbolic display of kissing in order to explore homosexuality as a valid form of paradise. This theatrical rage does not guarantee a subversive outcome – indeed *Grass* was read by several critics to confirm homophobic fantasies of deadly homosexuals and impossible passion – but it resists naturalisation and therefore draws attention to the contingency of abjection and the potential for the revaluation of sites of injury and suffering. Julia Borossa argues that drag, and by extension effeminacy, is a defiant response to the cruelty of unrealisable gender norms which cast those bodies which don't fit into illness and tragedy.



The alternative response [to falling ill] is to embrace the notion of a certain kind of masculinity as untenable. While stereotypes of the 'hysterical queen' in our culture may well be born out of homophobia and speak of rigid views of how men and women should behave, the drag queen – just like the 19<sup>th</sup>-century female hysteric – can also be seen as the one who knows the sham of these constraints and subverts them in performing them to perfect excess. (Borossa 2001: 61)

The perfect excess of de Frutos's choreography cites the homophobic image of the hysterical queen in order to reveal the very impossibility of masculinity. Indeed the title of *The Hypochondriac Bird* plays on the character of a lovesick swan in *Swan Lake* but also the stereotype of the neurotic, feathery effeminate (which, in Bourne's version, is displaced onto the Prince rather than the Swan). De Frutos's work radically deploys the illness of hysteria through a staging of the sick homosexual which redirects the self-violence of abjection into a rage against masculine normativity and the pervasive demand that his desire should be rendered fatal. In doing so he risks being infected by the very illness he cites but, as discussed in chapter one, Judith Butler suggests that the 'hyperbolic gesture' uses the very terms of its subjection in order to refigure the distribution of power, "to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources impure" (Butler 1993:241). The impurity of de Frutos's choreography explores hysterical, naked, bleeding, sexual bodies and the pollution of categories of 'race', gender and sexuality by abject eroticism and foreclosed mourning. His choreography also takes up the defiled characters which haunt the edges of masculinity and repeats them, recirculating them but also contesting the very repudiation which gives them shape. Avowing both desire and punishment, pleasure and suffering, de Frutos stages a complex intervention into representations of homosexuality as the Other of masculinity.



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<sup>1</sup> In *Beautiful Lecture* (1968), Steve Paxton made a similar connection between *Swan Lake* and pornography when he simultaneously projected a film of the Bolshoi Ballet and a blue movie. In the text of his lecture-performance he drew attention to the pleasures of stretching in ballet and the physical experience of orgasm but, like de Frutos, his point was to question the teleological construction of desire in both ballet and porn. According to Jill Johnston he finished the lecture with a question "Why are we in the West so hung up on orgasm" (Johnston 1998: 206). Johnston however disputes Paxton's identification of ballet with pleasure, despite his subversive intent, since, she argues, it's a discipline of the body which is closer to "an unrelieved exercise in phallic erected exhibitionism" (1998: 207). This reading of ballet as phallic has also been forwarded in different ways by Rose English (1980) and Susan Leigh Foster (1996). De Frutos doesn't directly cite balletic vocabulary in his choreography of sex but Tchaikovsky's score, which appears in various sections of *The Hypochondriac Bird*, provides a rereading of *Swan Lake* in which phallicism and pornographic narratives are subverted. A difference between Paxton and de Frutos is however that Paxton's critique remained implicitly heterosexual due to both the content of the film and the open-secret of Paxton's sexuality whereas de Frutos's piece is defiantly queer.

<sup>2</sup> *From Here To Eternity* (1953) directed by Fred Zinnemann. De Frutos on the South Bank Show suggests that the famous shots of Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr lying in an embrace on a beach in Hawaii while waves cover them was a reference point for his piece but unlike Lea Anderson's take on Schiele, this reference is not made explicit in the choreography.

<sup>3</sup> This pervasive cultural 'effeminophobia' needs to be qualified by stating that Sedgwick, Butler and Gere are all writing from a North American perspective where both mainstream and conservative gay culture tend to disavow effeminacy. Within British popular culture the effeminate man has not been denied representation – indeed he enjoys a particularly favoured role as a nationally recognised and, to some extent, loved figure (see Dyer 2002). In America effeminacy has traditionally been marginalised (see Andy Warhol on being 'swish' 1996: 12) or associated with a kind of English eccentricity (Quentin Crisp, the 'stately homo of England', found a degree of notoriety and acceptance in New York). In Britain comedians such as Kenneth Williams, Charles Hawtrey, John Inman, Larry Grayson and Julian Clary have enjoyed popularity despite, or even because of, their effeminised performance styles. More recently Graham Norton has become one of the most successful presenters on British television even though he is openly gay and camp – indeed in a prime time poll he was voted the top British Camp Icon. Brian Dowling, the winner of the reality TV programme *Big Brother 2* in 2001, was openly homosexual and effeminate and yet won more public support than any other contestant (and more than the other gay contestant Josh who was far more 'masculine'). He is the only contestant so far to have survived the instant celebrity such shows confer and has gone on to become a successful children's television presenter. Whilst there isn't space within this study to interrogate these instances of popular effeminacy it could be argued that these figures only work if they are comedic characters – they are loved for their sniping bitter wit and perverse innuendo and for their failures to be 'manly'. The laughter is however often at the expense of these figures – they are rarely threatening and they are often portrayed as grotesque and melancholy. Nevertheless, in discussing the abjection of effeminacy I do not wish to disavow the complex ambiguities and pleasures of such figures. Nor do I wish to downplay the importance of these popular figures in the shifting social acknowledgement and acceptance of homosexuality.

<sup>4</sup> Sedgwick's concern in this particular study is to interrogate the advice given to parents with "Gender Identity Disordered" children – i.e. masculine girls and effeminate boys, hence her focus on the abjection of the effeminate boy from gay thought. Nevertheless her observations can also be extended to include adult effeminate men. Sedgwick *Tendencies* London: Routledge, 1994.



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<sup>5</sup> In a previous solo, *Transatlantic* (1996) de Frutos used Sondheim's score for *Gypsy* in an exploration of his complex cultural identity which also used a flamenco style. Whilst flamenco is largely a Spanish dance form it has roots in Indian and African dance and bears traces of the border crossings of gypsy culture.



## **5. The Featherstonehaughs – Sketching Surface Politics**

In 1918 the Viennese artist Egon Schiele, aged only 28, died from Spanish Influenza leaving behind a large body of paintings, drawings and sketchbooks. Eighty years later Lea Anderson took these materials as a score for the tenth anniversary piece of her all-male company The Featherstonehaughs, reanimating across the bodies of six dancers the sickly, fragmentary and eroticised figures of Schiele's work. *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* (1998) reproduces paintings and drawings which deal explicitly with sexuality and mortality, choreographically collaged together to create a work that addresses these major themes of Schiele's work in terms of the aesthetics of abjection. Although Schiele is considered as a key figure in the Expressionist movement, Anderson does not use his work to tell his story or explore the psychological interiority of either herself or the dancers. The emphasis in the work is on surface layers of appearance and a radical stylisation of the body rather than the expression of an internal essence. The piece, 'drawing' on Schiele, also draws attention to its construction and in this chapter I will explore how this explicit process of quotation emphasises a subjectivity performatively brought into being through the play of acts, gestures, and enactments. The choreography of twisted bodies and contorted faces cites expressive notions of communication but refuses to present the body as a surface on which the truth of an internal masculine identity can be read.

As discussed in chapter one, Judith Butler has argued that normative readings of gender identity present surface stylisation as evidence of psychological depth and an original 'sex'. These are situated 'inside' the subject and are posited as the causes of these 'outside' acts, the truth behind their culturally variable manifestations. Butler argues against the notion of an internal 'truth' behind gender performance and instead proposes that this spatial division between inside and



outside is itself a surface signification, asking “how does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?” (1990b: 134). *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*, is explicitly concerned with the figuration of the body and the playing out of ‘depth’ on multiple surfaces through a theatricality which emphasises excessive absences and melancholic hyperbole. I will argue that Anderson’s choreography can be characterised by reproduction and reflection and these form the main sections of this chapter. My main focus in this chapter is on the live version of *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* but I will also consider how it was reworked for camera by Anderson and Kevin McKiernan in *The Lost Dances of Egon Schiele* (2002), particularly focusing upon how Anderson further elaborated upon the deployment of strategies of reflection, using the framing of the camera to draw attention to the construction of desire.

In my discussion of Anderson’s staging of Egon Schiele’s work I will draw parallels with Butler’s deconstruction of gender as a layering of appearances that do not hide an underlying biological or psychological depth but instead cite this depth through stylised corporeal actions. I will also examine Foucault’s rejection of ‘the repressive hypothesis’ when considering the depiction of sexuality in Schiele’s paintings, and consequently Anderson’s choreography, and explore how both artist and choreographer are commenting upon the discursive production of ‘sex’ rather than the expression of sexual truth. I will turn to consider how Anderson’s reproduction of the deathly figures from Schiele’s oeuvre can be analysed as deploying an uncanny disruption of melancholic gender with reference to Freud’s discussion of the *unheimlich*. It is my contention that Anderson disrupts the disjunctive binary of inner/outer and reproduces images of melancholic sexualised masculinity in order to reveal the discourse of ‘sex’ as a truth as a citational practice and hence potentially open for refiguration.



## 5.1 The piece

*The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* marks a change of direction, in their first full-length work, the conversational jokiness of previous years has been replaced with a darker tone. (Cavendish 1998:32)

A disturbingly dark piece of work, Egon Schiele finds both Anderson and The Featherstonehaughs closing the book on the past and determinedly striking out in a new direction. (Watson 1998: 4)

*The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* was made ten years after the company formed, made two years after *The Featherstonehaughs Go Las Vegas* in 1995, and in general, as the quotes above attest, was received by critics as something of an anomaly in Anderson's history of work for the company. For Judith Mackrell in *The Guardian* it had "a very different look from the old format" (1998a: 14), meaning that whereas the early Featherstonehaughs performances were collections of vignettes, often with talking, singing or other 'non-dance' intersections this was the first piece which was presented as an evening-length work. The all female sister group, The Cholmondeleys, had presented full length work since the late 1980s with pieces such as *Flesh and Blood* in 1989. Joint company works, such as *Precious* from 1993, also explored one set of themes throughout. Both *The Bends* (1994) and *Go Las Vegas* (1995) were Featherstonehaughs pieces which were based around a theme (submarines and Las Vegas respectively) but they kept the sectional format of the earlier pieces and included interludes and titles for the shorter pieces. Although *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* is structured in sections the program did not indicate that there were different names for these and the dancers disappear into the wings when not dancing, whereas in previous shows they would hang around, drink and get changed at the sides of



stage. As noted above there is also a perceived shift in tone – if previous Featherstonehaughs show could be perceived in terms of “conversational jokiness” then this piece neither has the familiarity of conversation nor the light humour of a joke.

*The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*<sup>1</sup> begins with the dancers in a series of tableaux punctuated by blackouts drawn from the series of paintings Schiele executed whilst imprisoned in 1912 – the dancers are lying on mattresses in underwear with grey-brown worsted blankets in poses suggesting sleep – Anderson suggested that she wanted to prologue the piece with a suggestion of a dream/nightmare state. The set, designed by Simon Corder, is a square made of fluorescent tubes laid on the floor which both describe the central area of the performance but also construct the areas outside as somehow both ‘off the page’ and yet a part of what is being sketched out within in. Throughout the piece the overhead lighting, in addition to the floor lights, creates a gloomy darkness with squares of light which pick out the vivid hues of Sandy Powell’s costumes -green, blue, turquoise, red, orange and purple washed-out suits. The harsh, unflattering glare of the fluorescents emphasises the ghoulishly excessive make-up by David Hoyle, (who is also the queer performance artist The Divine David). The dancers pull their faces into grimaces, further highlighting the excessiveness of the make-up, to replicate the putrescent, undead appearance which Arthur Roessler identified and defended in Schiele’s portraits.<sup>2</sup>

Egon Schiele has seen and painted human faces that have a pale sheen and a pained smile and are like the faces of vampires deprived of their gruesome nutrition; faces of the possessed, their souls festering, their unutterable suffering turning to a mask like rigidity...He has seen and painted eyes as cold as gems in human faces as shimmer with the pallid colours of decay, and he has seen death beneath the skin. (Roessler cited in Steiner 2000: 54)



These deathly figures move through poses taken directly from Schiele's portraits, "with gaping mouths and grimaces, pulling at their cheeks, in jagged distorted poses, arms bent brittly at right angles, so rigid that you think the flicking fingers might drop off" (Dougill 1998a: 8). The score for the piece is by long-time collaborator Drosten Madden who collages together samples of dub, reggae and drum and bass but also creates a eerie soundscape to emphasise the strangeness of the zombie-like figures.<sup>3</sup> There are also samples from David Bowie's *Starman* and Iggy Pop's *Turn Blue*, and a kitsch version of *The Blue Danube* downloaded from the internet is used for the final section of trios – an ironic aural reminder of Schiele's original context in fin de siècle Vienna, brought into relief by a reference to his 'cult' status amongst 1970s rockstars.

Anderson and the dancers in the rehearsal process took Schiele's sketch books and connected together various images, calling this a 'movement string', which was then given a spatial direction along horizontal, diagonal and back and forward planes. The sketch books show arrangements of groups of figures within a square and the floor patterns were developed out of these, using the square of lights as the grid. In the first main section of the piece after the prologue the dancers move in and out of the square, advancing and reversing along the lines with a tense and awkward gait, gazing out at the audience as they move through the poses. The movement is repeated, reversed and duplicated as dancers pick up, mirror, or exchange movement strings to create complex layered patterns of flattened, disjointed figures. Angry facial contortions are contrasted by passive bodies or urgent twisted limbs are juxtaposed with blank stares to create unsettling fragmented figures. This section is followed by a series of simultaneous duets which are interrupted or left incomplete, often with one partner leaving the stage to create a strange solo 'duet' where the remaining partner echoes the lost movements of the departed figure. The duets are again organised frontally and the



dancers manipulate each other, with no indication of effort or emotion, into images from Schiele's pictures of couples and doubled self-portraits.

The duets are followed by a section that Anderson called "scribbling", involving off-balance running and falling, with the dancers grasping at the air and flailing their limbs in carefully choreographed unison, tumbling through the space so as to mimic the urgent sketchy outlines of Schiele's figures. Again they exchange and multiply these movement strings with complex and intricate rhythms. The piece then slows down to reveal some of the individual positions that the dancer's have been moving through – Anderson suggested that this was to highlight the fact that the choreography is composed of many different portraits strung together and she wanted to give the audience time to acknowledge that the sequences are constructed from joined still images. These representations of Schiele's idiosyncratic postures are then subject to further reflection - while Madden's score plays the sound of pencils sketching on paper, three dancers (Frank Bock, Rem Lee and Luca Silvestrini) adopt poses, remove their clothes, and arrange themselves into various group shapes, all the time looking out to the audience. They stage a life class with the audience called into the role of both voyeur and artist.

The 'models' are then dismissed, they collect their clothes and walk off stage but Bock pauses at the edge of the square, strikes a pose and the lights change, (an echo of his first appearance at the end of the prologue). Stephen Kirkham rolls in dressed in a body suit painted from a series of Schiele's nude self-portraits and he is joined by Dan O'Neill and Eddie Nixon, also in 'naked' catsuits, and they perform in unison a string of movement drawn from Schiele's masturbation portraits and his sexually explicit pictures of female models and girls. The movement is floor-bound, never rising much above kneeling height, and the poses are achieved by backs arching, pelvises pushed out, arms and legs twisting and straining. The stage is lit only by five pools of light, the same as in the prologue, and the dancers tumble and



roll in and out of these spots. O'Neill then leaves and Kirkham and Nixon perform a duet drawn from the portraits of heterosexual and lesbian couples. The duet, like the trio, is floor-bound and has a sinuous quality as the dancers pull each other into the poses, caressing and wrapping their limbs around each other, adopting sexual positions and then melting into others. The dancers do not face each other or appear engaged in the acts they are performing – it is staged for the audience and the focus is almost always out to the viewer. Following the exit of the duet, O'Neill returns and repeats the poses from the trio but this time towards Lee who is watching him, sitting on the pile of blankets stacked just outside the square of fluorescent tubes, later to be joined by Bock. Again the choreography draws explicit attention to the act of looking as the audience is again reminded of their voyeurism.

The final section, preceded by some strange vanishing acts from Bock and Lee as they are whisked from blankets into the wings, involves two trios. Anderson stated that this section is based on the pictures which depict Schiele, his model and the model's reflection, and the objective of the movement string is to help the dancer who is 'Schiele' out of the square of light. They also perform triplicated images of photos of Schiele looking at himself in his studio mirror, hands in his pockets. Anderson's work often involves a spectacular finale (the previous piece, *Go Las Vegas*, involved special reflective suits that the audience had to hold torches to see) but *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* slowly dissipates and the fluorescent tubes gradually switch off to leave the trace of the final image of Kirkham and Lee downstage staring out. This image nonetheless contains what I will discuss as the key elements of the piece – reproduction and reflection, the explicit address of the audience, and a blank absence that suggests loss, melancholia and death which is neither narrated nor expressed but sketched out through a figuration of the surfaces of the body.



## 5.2 Reproduction

The title of *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* makes an explicit reference to the complex strategy of reproduction that is central to the piece. Anderson reveals, before the performance has even begun, the working process of her choreography through the play on the meanings of the word 'draw'. The piece 'draws on' the Sketch Books in terms of taking influence from them; to draw on is to use as a resource, but they are also sketch books which are 'drawn on' by making marks; to draw is to produce a picture or diagram by making lines and marks, to trace or produce a line on a surface. The title suggests that the choreography is therefore using the work of Egon Schiele in order to produce a figure and to mark out lines upon a surface. The Featherstonehaughs are given some agency in this since it is they who are doing the 'drawing' but as I will argue, the piece can be read to figure this agency as found in the act of drawing rather than in a position prior to the process of figuration. The Featherstonehaughs sketch out their own subjectivity through the citation and repetition of Egon Schiele's images and in doing so enable a deconstruction of notions of interiority and expression.

Explaining her approach to Donald Huterer for *The Times*, Anderson said, "I know everyone will assume I'm taking responsibility for portraying the essence of Schiele, and I'm not. I just subjected his sketchbooks to my own rules. But every single position you'll see will have come from a painting or sketch of his" (Huterer 1998: 34). This rigorous reproduction of Schiele's work, which refuses to portray an 'essence', recirculates the discourses of sexuality and mortality which surround his paintings and sketches but also examines the underlying notions of subjectivity and artistic production. The work is not inspired by Schiele's life and there is no commentary on the images in the form of a straightforward narrative. Anderson's attention to the reproduction of Schiele's images, rather than his life story, draws attention to the process of choreography and the consumption of images.



In previous Featherstonehaughs productions there was an effort to assert an identity for the group behind the various images they performed, which helped to construct the ironic 'postmodern' cool style that critics have identified. This could be read (although it would not be my reading) as offering the assurance that this was only the deconstruction of images of masculinity and not of the masculine performers behind them. *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* confounded that expectation. Although the Featherstonehaughs are identifiable – and to those familiar with their work they are conventionally referred to by their first names as Dan, Eddie, Frank, Rem and Stephen (together with the newcomer Luca) – the choreography unsettles the audience as to where the Featherstonehaughs are in this piece. The performances don't so much emphasise a gap between performer and performance but rather the absence of this distinction. This is not the same as stating that the performances are so convincing that you suspend disbelief and see six Schieles – rather the choreography is highly stylised and structured so that the focus is upon the performance of Schiele's portraits of twisted figures not his life story or his hidden psychological depths. The bodies of the dancers are figured as painterly surfaces which do not signify the internal essence of Schiele, the interior selves of The Featherstonehaughs, or indeed of Lea Anderson but instead perform a formal arrangements of limbs, repeated gestures, and facial grimaces which both reproduce Schiele's aesthetic and draw attention to this process of replication. It is not however simply a formal or abstract piece of choreography because this stylised reproduction foregrounds the productive figuration of subjectivity. Uncanny melancholic figures stage sexualised meetings for the audience but their identity is drawn as the result of their movement rather than situated as the source of these expressive gestures, acts and styles.

In order to consider the various choreographic devices which deploy and deconstruct reproduction within *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*, I want to turn



to consider previous analyses of Anderson's work which focus upon her reflexive utilisation of imagery. Valerie Briginshaw (1996) has analysed *Perfect Moment* (1992), a film version of the stage piece *Birthday* (1992), which was made for the Cholmondeleys and the Featherstonehaughs together, and Sherril Dodds (1999) has analysed various pieces by Anderson in terms of their engagement with postmodern theory. Briginshaw argues that Anderson's work "plays with cultural codes such as representation, thereby exposing the political affiliations apparent in constructions of key concepts like gender and sexuality" (1996: 126). She uses Hal Foster's notion of "a postmodernism of resistance" (Foster 1985: xii), to argue that Anderson's choreography is a politically motivated deconstruction of representation and performance which reveals the construction of identity through imagery.

The operation of power can be exposed and challenged in postmodern dance, through self-reflexive representation devices such as intertextuality and parody, problematising subjects no longer unified but fragmented and traversed by a complex network of power axes such as gender, sexuality, race and class. (Briginshaw 1996: 125)

Three areas of investigation develop out of this statement in Briginshaw's analysis; self-reflexive performance, drag and parody, and intertextuality. Self-reflexive performance is described by Briginshaw in terms of an emphasis on surface image and a knowing use of choreographic practices;

Any sense of paramount 'reality' is here questioned through conventions of the performance medium. Performance becomes preoccupied with conventions or with performance itself. Painterly images such as 'patterns in space', 'icons' and tableaux' are prevalent. They are played with and included for their own sake, making the performance self-reflexive. The work comments on itself and, by association, on other performances and representations. (1996: 127)



It is Briginshaw's contention that the self-reflexivity in Anderson's work exposes the constitution of performance and thereby puts representations into inverted commas – "what has previously been seen as 'natural' or 'real' is exposed as 'cultural' or socially constructed, revealing the ideologically grounded status of representation" (ibid.). The association with 'painterly' imagery is obvious in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* as the whole piece is composed from Schiele's images and the choreography plays with notions of perspective and two-dimensionality. The many tableaux, spatial lines and iconographic images throughout clearly make reference to their quoted status due to their extremely stylised effect. The self-reflexivity of previous Featherstonehaughs pieces was enhanced through a marked contrast between the 'performance' space and the sides of stage where the dancers would watch the others 'perform' and hence draw the audience's attention to the constructed nature of the images or representations played out. The use of wings in *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* means that the performance is not broken in this way and the stylised bodies on stage are not contrasted by the 'normal' bodies of The Featherstonehaughs as 'themselves'. Rather than decrease the self-reflexivity of Anderson's imagery however the effect of this is to suspend the notion of 'normality' and the notion of anything 'natural' behind the uncanny, disturbing images on stage.

The Featherstonehaughs have enjoyed cult status within the British dance scene and, as their tenth anniversary show, *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* revisits their own image. As noted above, the piece marked a change both in the format and appearance from previous work for the company and this is picked up on in nearly every newspaper review. In interview with myself Anderson stated that she knew very well what worked and what was popular with the audience and she wanted to deliberately go against the common perception of the company as "extrovert and engagingly accessible...the ideal outlet for Anderson's comic



talents” (Watson 1998:4). As a result the piece seems to comment upon that particular perception of The Featherstonehaughs and it suggests that the previous style of work was perhaps never as easily “blokeish” (Gilbert 1998: 9) as the critics suggest. As I discuss below, Ramsay Burt has argued that Anderson, in earlier work for The Featherstonehaughs, established a ‘buddy-buddy’ feeling only to disrupt it and disturb the notions of masculinity that it cites. In *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* this masculinity is painted as melancholic and abject from the outset and there are few, if any, moments where normative masculinity is posited as either ideal or obtainable. Keith Watson explicitly links this with wider changes in British popular culture and the pervasiveness of the figure of the ‘New Lad’.

When The Featherstonehaughs first buddy bonded into the spotlight with *Clump* ten years ago, New Man was still a growing concern, boys in suits were a novelty and Loaded culture was still a bit of a bad dream some magazine executive was about to have. They were truly ahead of their time...It’s hardly their fault the world, in more ways than one, turned sour on them. (Watson 1998: 4)

The piece *Clump* (1987) involved all The Featherstonehaughs moving around stage as one unit, suggesting unity in a reimagined form of masculine solidarity. In interview Anderson suggested that it would be impossible for her to make a piece like that anymore and the isolated, disparate figures of *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* attest to a different physical mapping of masculinity. Anderson is still concerned with issues of gender and identity but the wider context of her work has changed and she has correspondingly shifted her focus to examine more explicitly the melancholia and abjection in the construction of contemporary masculinity. Anderson’s self-reflexive allusion to the ten year history of The Featherstonehaughs reveals that ‘masculinity’ is not a stable notion or a permanent cultural norm but a shifting nexus of discourses which can be contested and recirculated. As the values of masculinity have been reworked in popular culture,



Anderson's work enquires into the elisions and absences from the mainstream representational economy.

Briginshaw's second theoretical concept in analysing Anderson's representations is parody:

Parody also plays with the way things are represented. It shows that they are not 'real' but constructed ... any search for 'truth' or 'reality' becomes meaningless, and the imitative and constructed nature is revealed. The representation process is exposed through the performance, the staging foregrounds the image as image. (Briginshaw 1996: 128)

Briginshaw draws on Judith Butler's notion of drag as an example of parody and in the above quote specifically refers to a cross-dressing scene in *Perfect Moment*. It is Briginshaw's contention that in this scene it is not just the men, in using shoulder length wigs, who are performing 'femininity' but also the women. The overplayed parodic style of the performance reveals this 'femininity' to be an imitative construction with no original. Although *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* does not focus on a parody of 'masculinity' the excessive expressionistic style of the performance can be figured as parody in that it shows how the 'truth' and 'reality' that Expressionism purported to find inside is a surface effect of reproduction and imitation. Fredric Jameson's notion of parody is a reproduction which "capitalises on the uniqueness of...styles and seizes on their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities to produce an imitation which mocks the original, (Jameson 1988:15-16). The Featherstonehaughs reproduction of Egon Schiele is more similar to a Jamesonian pastiche in that the very notion of normality is lost.

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practise of mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical



impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor. (1988: 16).

I'm not suggesting that Anderson has lost her sense of humour in this piece but nevertheless it does mark a change in her approach to choreographic imagery which, especially for the *Featherstonehaughs*, was often marked by its ironic, deadpan wit. Egon Schiele is not being satirised in this piece and the extreme, grotesque contortions and grimaces are not reproduced so as to mock them by comparison with 'normal' male bodies and 'normal' behaviour. Rather it is this 'normality' which is being deconstructed and the norms which underlie our notions of identity are subject to scrutiny rather than the images on display. Judith Butler has read against Jameson's dismissal of pastiche to suggest that certain gender performances should be considered as subversive pastiche rather than bad copies or parodies of 'original' heterosexuality – "pastiche disputes the possibility of an 'original' or, in the case of gender, reveals the 'original' as a failed effort to 'copy' a phantasmatic ideal that cannot be copied without failure" (Butler 1990b: 157). *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* does just that through a 'blank parody', a choreographic copy of Schiele's images which does not mock the 'original' portraits but pastiches the notions of sexual subversion and authentic artistic subjectivity which have structured their reception. Whereas the previous piece *The Featherstonehaughs Go Las Vegas* took imagery from Brat Pack revues and Elvis films in order to play with these various icons of modern masculinity this piece uses the iconography of Schiele to disrupt the normative notions underpinning both identity politics and expressive choreography. A parody of Egon Schiele would mock his abnormal and unnatural images; Anderson's pastiche reuses these images to attack the very notions of abnormality and unnaturalness. In doing so the choreography reveals the failure inherent in any



performative attempt at masculine coherence and thereby presents a blank surface with dissociated acts of 'masculinity' sketched out across it.

The third figure in Briginshaw's analysis of *Perfect Moment* is intertextuality, "a representational and allusive device where one text refers to or quotes from another" (Briginshaw 1996: 128). This is revealed where Anderson clearly quotes from magazine portraits, Hollywood movies and advertising. Briginshaw argues that Anderson's use of quoted movement further deconstructs her staged representations of gender because they are insistently rendered as 'constructions' rather than expressions of essences. The audience is made aware of the position of the performance in an economy of representations and of the relationships between those images Anderson is using and those encountered in various media, from high art to low culture. *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* is a departure from previous pieces in that all the images come from one source and Anderson does not mix high and low culture or juxtapose contrasting images. Although I argue that Anderson is not critiquing Schiele, or parodying his pictures in order to ridicule them, this piece does examine the value attached both to his work and to that of *The Featherstonehaughs*.

Briginshaw suggests that Anderson's intertextuality comments upon the commodification of images and "emphasises the interchangeability of the cultural and economic domains" (Briginshaw 1996: 129). Schiele's images are circulated widely throughout contemporary culture with various values attached; both elite and popular, mainstream and counterculture. In Vienna the new Leopold Museum opened in 2001 specifically dedicated to showing Schiele's work and when Tate Modern in London mounted an exhibition in 2001, called 'Century City', they gathered together forty-five works by Schiele, more than any other Viennese artist, to represent Vienna 1908-1918. Whilst conducting the research for this chapter every bookshop I visited had Taschen postcard books and monographs of Schiele on sale. Jenny Gilbert in *The Observer* in a review of *The Featherstonehaughs*



*Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* reflects upon this wide availability of Schiele reproductions, suggesting that “everyone knows Schiele’s sinewy, hollow-eyed nudes, the student-bedroom poster of choice for those who’ve just discovered sex” (1998: 9). Anderson also alludes to the adoption of Schiele by David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Lou Reed during the early 1970s as a figure of sexual revolt.

Anderson was choreographer for the film *Velvet Goldmine* (1998 directed by Todd Haynes) which fictionalised the relationships between these three figures and she remarked that she re-encountered Schiele’s work during her research for the film. The sampling of some of their songs in the score brings out this reference to Schiele’s cult status and accentuates the complex representational economy involved in reproducing Schiele’s work.

The political potential of a critical engagement with cultural value forms the main focus of Sherril Dodds’ writing on Anderson. Dodds, like Briginshaw, argues that Anderson’s work can be used to exemplify notions of postmodernism, suggesting that there are various issues arising from the connections and exchanges between Anderson’s choreography and the images of popular culture. Dodds organises her analysis of Anderson’s work into three strands – the exemplification of certain postmodern characteristics, the examination of the workings of postmodern culture, and the political potential of Anderson’s intertextuality. What interests me here is less how Dodds relates Anderson to postmodern theory than what she asserts are the key features of Anderson’s choreographic reproduction and their political potential. These, I would suggest, can be classified in terms of pleasures and identities and bricolage.

Dodds argues that the meanings, pleasures and identities of Anderson’s work can be understood with reference to Fiske’s (1991) formulation of the power dynamics of popular culture and image consumption. Since it is “the consumers who activate the cultural meanings and values of commodities in order to construct self-identities and social relations” (Dodds 1999: 210), Anderson’s work, by virtue of its



popular content and use of commoditised imagery, invites an audience to participate in a reflexive reading. Dodds' analysis therefore concurs with Briginshaw's assertion of the self-reflexivity of Anderson's work but includes the audience in the process of rendering the performance into a commentary on the economy of reproduction. I discuss below how the reflexivity of *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* involves precisely this focus on the audience's spectatorial role. The pleasures of Anderson's choreography, for Dodds, are to be found in the activation of cultural meaning, in the reflexive play of identities and in the reading of the intertextual imagery which navigates crossings between contemporary dance, pop culture, the underground, and various other cultural fields of representation and performance.

Part of the sources for these pleasures lie in the particular structural technique that characterises Anderson's choreographic style. Dodds draws similarities between Anderson's choreographic process and that of bricolage. Applied by Levi-Strauss to the connections between disparate elements in a culture, 'bricolage' has been used by Dick Hebdige to examine the subcultural appropriation of signs and commodities and the disruption caused "by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which [serves] to erase or subvert their original straight meanings ... [they are] transformed onto 'empty' fetishes, objects to be desired, fondled and valued in their own right" (Hebdige 1979: 104-105). Hebdige cites punks as exemplars of this fondling, subversive re-valuing of commodities – their safety-pinned, ripped clothes, the rock/reggae/pop recycling of beats, and the collaged fanzine culture all place symbols next to each other to both subvert meanings and create a subcultural identity. Hebdige also suggests that the twentieth century avant-garde has historically been comprised of bricoleur movements – Dada, Surrealism, and Pop Art – and has been influenced in particular by the process of collage. Hebdige refers to the 'collage aesthetic' as an "anarchic discourse", theorised in Andre Breton's manifestos as prompting



... *a total revolution of the object*: acting to divert the object from its ends by coupling it to a new name and signing it. ... Perturbation and deformation are in demand here for their own sakes. ... Objects thus reassembled have in common the fact that they derive from and yet succeed in differing from the objects which surround us, by *simple change of role*. (cited in Hebdige 1979: 105-106)

A shorter version of Dodds' chapter on Anderson was published in *Dance Theatre Journal*, accompanied by pages of Lea Anderson's scrapbooks which show the sources of the visual images she recreates in her work (e.g. a picture of Elvis Presley in Jailhouse Rock was recreated in the section 'Elvis Legs' from '*The Featherstonehaughs Go Las Vegas*'). These scrapbooks are in a very literal sense 'collages' of various seemingly incongruous images – Dodds states that:

Whereas some dance practitioners are concerned with motion and travelling through space, Anderson displays a predilection for static shape, the space around the body and tableaux designs. This is largely to do with her working processes based on the images that she collects in notebooks. (Dodds 1995: 33)

This choreographic collage aesthetic is therefore partly a spatial device resulting in the flatness of the performance style and the layering of images<sup>4</sup>. Although Dodds does not focus on the 'perturbation and deformation' potential of Anderson's collagist process, referring instead to the formal structures and design concepts, this political-punk discourse precipitates a critique of expressive masculinity in the Egon Schiele piece. Anderson's starting point for this piece was discovering the Egon Schiele sketch books in the bookshop of the Arnolfini whilst on tour in the early 1990s; her own method of collecting images in scrapbooks seemed to have resonance with Schiele's books of sketched figures and she began to consider ways of staging Schiele's sketchbooks in the same way in which she would stage



her own. Anderson stated that it was a method of further distancing herself from the choreography and in interview she stated that she is not interested in creating a sequence that feels nice to do on her own body then transferring it onto others (indeed she only ever created movement on herself for *The Cholmondeleys* and not for *The Featherstonehaughs*). Her interest is in the visual effect of choreography rather than what it feels like to dance – this is clearly very different from the modern dance dictum to move from the inside out<sup>5</sup> or indeed many of the alternative dance techniques such as Contact Improvisation, Release or Mind-Body Centering which focus on the ‘internal’ movement of the body rather than on its visual effect.<sup>6</sup>

Anderson uses collages to create movement which she then structures - with *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* she not only used Schiele’s portraits in order to create movement but also devised the compositional rules from the structure of the sketch books. With previous pieces Anderson stated that she didn’t return to the collages once the choreography had been made and she was happy for it to develop into something else. With this piece the company had to maintain a faithful relation to the images and stick to the rules of the sketchbooks which were kept in the rehearsal room throughout the entire process. Anderson commented that the dancers would check to see that they were adhering to the forms of the portraits, adding a hand gesture if they discovered they weren’t being faithful enough. Anderson suggested that this further distanced her own expression from the choreography and enabled the creation of something different within her work rather than the expected Featherstonehaughs style. As I will discuss below this postmodernist emphasis on bricolage and collage precipitates a critique of the artist as the suffering genius behind the images he (and it is usually *he*) presents – although Anderson is still credited as the choreographer of the work it is difficult, if not impossible, to read the piece as evidence of her psychological interiority or authentic artistic self.



The question remains however as to what discourses Anderson is reproducing, and to what effect, through the various strategies identified by Briginshaw and Dodds. In replicating the figures from Schiele's paintings and sketches Anderson is addressing the various themes of his work and encountering the issues of identity, sexuality and mortality figured upon the surfaces of his work. The chapter turns now to examine critical writing on Schiele's work in order to consider the discourses called into play through Anderson's strategies of reproduction. Whereas many critics link Schiele with Freud and the exploration of psychoanalytic tropes of sexuality, I want to examine how Michel Foucault's notion of the discursive production of 'sex' can be used to explore Anderson's critique of interiority through her deployment of Schiele's sexualised imagery.

### 5.3 Schiele and Foucault's discourses of sexuality

There can be no doubt that in Schiele's time sexuality was the topic. From psychoanalysis by way of medicine to art, minds everywhere were concentrated on sex, whether with a view to its suppression or emancipation. (Schröder 1999: 47)

Many of the art historians who examine Egon Schiele's work link him explicitly with the concerns of Vienna, and of Western Europe in general, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Schiele died in 1918, at the age of 28, having had a decade of both success and notoriety as a key figure in the Viennese art world. As Klaus Schröder argues above this was a period in which sexuality was invested with various discourses – artistic, medical and juridical together with the developing science of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud, working in Vienna contemporaneously with Schiele, had introduced the term 'psychoanalysis' in 1896, a year after publishing his interpretations of hysteric patients at the famous Salpêtrière in Paris. Although Freud would publish his major treatise after the first world war, and



therefore after Schiele's death, in the first two decades of the twentieth century psychoanalysis was one of many disciplines engaging with notions of identity and sexuality which were also the key elements addressed in Schiele's paintings. The psychoanalytically trained art historian Dr Danielle Knafo has analysed Schiele's work using Freudian concepts and suggests that both the paintings and Freud's theory emerge out of the historical situation of the repressive Viennese attitudes towards sexual identity;

Replete with depictions of androgynous, masturbating Lolitas, emaciated trees, uninhabited towns, psychologically penetrating portraits in bizarre pantomime poses, and most of all, convulsively gyrating, amputated and castrated nude self-portraits, Egon Schiele's art can easily be understood as containing a statement about the culture in which he lived. It mirrored fin-de-siècle Vienna's sense of fragmentation and doom and unmasked the hypocrisy of its superficial values. As one of the first to cultivate an art centered on the self, Schiele, like his contemporary, Sigmund Freud, revealed the face of modern man. Schiele's compelling explorations into his own psychic depths, primarily through repeated, merciless confrontations with his sexuality and mortality, paralleled the growing concerns of psychoanalysis at that time. (Knafo 1993: 21)

Knafo's argument is that Schiele, like Freud, was confronting the taboos of sexuality both personally and as an artist and as such his works can be read as evidence of the working out of repressed bourgeois neuroses about sex and death through his representation of internal, psychic states. A similar argument can be found in Alessandra Comini's study of Schiele, who asserts that "the elusive element which this Expressionist artist sought in his portraiture accurately mirrors the collective cultural quest of his time: the inner self – psychological man, rather than the political, religious or economic man of times past" (Comini 1974: 1). This was also the interpretation of Schiele's contemporaries and in 1912, Arthur



Roessler, critic and mentor to Schiele, wrote to a Viennese newspaper in defence of Schiele's paintings which in that year were featured in exhibitions in Vienna, Munich and Cologne and which depicted ghastly, deformed naked bodies. Roessler argued against the censorious attention, and scandal they were attracting;

Some of Schiele's portraits showed them that he was able to reveal the inner self of a person on the outside, and they were horrified by the thought of seeing things that are carefully kept hidden, things urinous and crawling with vermin and eaten away with corruption.(cited in Steiner 2000: 54)

This reluctance of the bourgeoisie to face their 'inner truths', and the role of the artist to convey them, was considered by contemporary artists and writers to be a key element of the development of Expressionism. In an anthology of recent writings on Expressionism, Behr, Fanning and Jarman suggest that the twisted depictions of reality in expressionist painting occur because "the external objective world is filtered through the internal subjective world of the artist's emotions in an attempt to express an inner reality – the psychological reality behind appearances" (Behr, Fanning & Jarman 1993: 1). If Vienna was superficial and hypocritical in its normative values then Schiele penetrated behind these values by painting himself not as an attractive or respectable man but as an emaciated, tortured, perverted and decaying body – this was 'the psychological reality' behind Viennese respectability. According to this reading the figures in Schiele's work are sexually explicit in order to break societal taboos and they appear twisted and tormented in order to reveal the psychological effect of the cultural restrictions on individual expression. Anderson's choreography, in staging these abject bodies, therefore encounters both explicit sexuality and its privileged status as the interior truth of a hypocritical society. As noted above Keith Watson, and other critics, link the changes in Anderson's choreography with shifts in late 1990s notions of masculinity. Is Anderson therefore using Schiele's images, eighty years after he



died, to explore the contradictions of sexuality in contemporary culture? I argue that the choreography does allegorise what Judith Butler has identified as “a culture of gender melancholy in which masculinity and femininity emerge as the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love” (Butler 1997b: 140), but the work reinscribes the figures of Schiele as the performative effects of contemporary discourses rather than the ‘depth’ or ‘truth’ hidden beneath. Anderson’s accentuation of the reiterative stylisation of the surfaces of the body and the playing out of melancholic abject bodies radically challenges the notion of a repressed interiority which expresses itself through art.

Michel Foucault has argued against the notion of a ‘repressive hypothesis’ when analysing attitudes towards sex. He argues that the Victorian period (1837- 1901) was a time during which the body was invested with sexual discourse rather than the popularly conceived time of silence and taboo. Coming at the end of this period, it can be argued that Schiele was not therefore simply revealing the ‘truth’ of sex behind fin-de-siècle hypocrisy or exposing his auto-erotic drives to break societal repression. Indeed during this period Vienna was a centre of productive sexual discourses – not only Freud but Otto Weininger, Magnus Hirschfeld and Baron von Krafft-Ebing were all publishing work which pathologised deviance and brought the new discourses of psychology to bear upon the body and sexuality, concurring with Foucault’s suggestion of a growth in sexual discourse.

Nineteenth century “bourgeois society” – and it is doubtless still with us – was a society of blatant and fragmented perversion. And this was not by way of hypocrisy, for nothing was more manifest and more prolix, or more manifestly taken over by discourses and institutions. Not because, having tried to erect too rigid or too general a barrier against sexuality, society succeeded only in giving rise to a whole perverse outbreak and a long pathology of the sexual instinct. At issue, rather, is the type of power it brought to bear on the body and on sex. In point of fact, this power had



neither the form of the law, nor the effects of the taboo. On the contrary, it acted by multiplication of singular sexualities. It did not set boundaries for sexuality; it extended the various forms of sexuality, pursuing them according to indefinite lines of penetration. It did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals. It did not seek to avoid it; it attracted its varieties by means of spirals in which pleasure and power reinforced one another. (Foucault 1998: 47)

If, as Foucault contends, the 1890s witnessed a spiralling of discourses on sexuality, then Anderson's staging of Schiele's figures reveals that in the 1990s this burgeoning discursive production of sexed, desiring bodies continues. As discussed in chapter two, hegemonic forms of masculinity are produced through the regulation of compulsory heterosexuality and the disavowal of other possibilities of sexual pleasure and grievable loss. This proscribed loss of homosexuality as a mandate for entering into intelligible gendered subjectivity is not a 'repression' of a homosexual disposition but rather the production of homosexuality as the unliveable outside of masculinity. Butler suggests that the notion of a 'repressive law' does not describe the exclusion of homosexuality from discourse but actually produces the silences and elisions it claims to express; "distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable (delimiting and constructing the domain of the unspeakable), the legitimate from the illegitimate" (Butler 1990b: 65). Anderson's choreography figures bodies that are, therefore, not outside of discourse but are the abject spectres which haunt the scene of conventional masculinity as the unspeakable and illegitimate conditions for the perpetuation of a 'normal' masculine body. Whereas Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*, discussed in chapter three, allegorises the melancholia of twentieth century masculinity but reaffirms the impossibility of homosexuality through fetishised masculine normativity, *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* reproduces the discourses of melancholia but does so in order to deconstruct the masculine norms that require certain bodies and pleasures remain unspoken.



In the spirals of sexual discourse and the production of speakable sex, Foucault identifies four figures of “strategic unities” (1998: 103) which emerged during the eighteenth century and which were developed over the following two centuries – “four privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian [reproductive] couple, and the perverse adult,” (Foucault 1998: 105). These four figures are taken up and reproduced in Schiele’s sketches and, consequently, Anderson’s choreography but this reproduction is not an uncritical deployment of discourse but a process of citation that reveals the instabilities and contradictions in these ‘unities’, a “reverse discourse” (ibid.) that adopts hegemonic norms of sexuality only to undermine and expose them in acts of explicit quotation.

### 5.3a The Hysterical Woman

The first unity, the hysterical woman, was a topic of great interest in fin-de-siècle Vienna, particularly focused on the infamous displays by Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière in Paris who ‘exhibited’ women in the thrall of hysteric states. During the late Victorian period photographs and drawings of hysterics by Charcot’s assistant Dr. Paul Richer, were catalogued and widely circulated throughout Europe and in a book published in 1887, *Les démoniaques dans l’art*, links were drawn between the iconographies of portraiture and hysteria. Schröder suggests that there is a great similarity between Richer’s catalogue of iconographic poses and Schiele’s portraits and therefore argues that the internal truth of Schiele’s psychological state is not being expressed but cited: “authors of psychoanalytically oriented studies, who have sought to detect psychic disturbances in Schiele, have failed to recognize the purely artistic attraction of these well-publicized symptoms of mental illness. The analytically trained art



historian mistakes something that was really only a quotable attribute for the genuine article” (Schröder 1996: 66).

Here Schröder is probably referring to Dr Danielle Knafo’s psychological profile of Schiele and Alessandra Comini’s more psychoanalytical moments. In an interview with myself, Lea Anderson also spoke of her rejection of Knafo’s analysis, suggesting that it was based on a complete misunderstanding of the paintings coupled with an overdetermination of their meaning in terms which were not Schiele’s own. Anderson’s stated interest, like Schiele’s, was in the effect of these visual quotations rather than in constructing a psychological motivation as their cause. Both Schiele and Anderson transpose the iconography of what was generally construed as a disease of the female body and a malaise arising from feminine sexuality onto male bodies, not as a form of parodic drag but to displace the truths about sex that hysteria was read to reveal. Both artist and choreographer exploit the hysteric body for its excessive and disturbing effect since, as I discussed in chapter two, hysteria is a bodily performance which confounds the process of reading. Hysteria can both demand and disrupt a narrative search for a true cause – therefore it is a ‘disease’ which cannot live up to its classification as such since there is no origin, object or aim to the symptoms and it renders the body excessive and performative. Although Foucault argues that it was a unity which served to anchor discourses on sex in female bodies, Elin Diamond suggests that it was unsuccessful since the hysteric was not speaking of the truth of her sexuality but was performatively both citing and resisting the pathologisation of ‘sex’. Diamond explicitly links hysteria and melodrama as performance practices which stage excessive bodies: “the nineteenth-century melodramatic actor and the hysteric shared a similar repertory of signs; the facial grimace, eye-rolling, teeth-gnashing, heavy sighs, fainting, shrieking, shivering, choking” (Diamond 1997: 10). This repertory of signs however could not be easily decoded and, as I explored in relation to Javier de Frutos’s choreography in the



previous chapter, the melodramatic body can be deployed to confuse and trouble the expression of interiority.

Anderson's choreography does not have the intense theatricality of de Frutos however and she stages a particularly blank form of melodrama in that these actions are isolated, repeated, reversed and juxtaposed in a collage. There is no narrative and the unreadability of the hysterical body is emphasised through a 'cool', disengaged performance style which promises no malady behind the actions. Judith Mackrell in the *Guardian* regretted that Anderson, "doesn't risk breaking apart its carefully fashioned surface to investigate what kinds of anguish or appetite might animate these half-live creatures" (Mackrell 1998a), but this notion of emotional narrative and internal motivation is purposely confounded by Anderson's multiplication of Schiele's hysterical iconography. In 1910 Schiele travelled from Vienna to Krumau with his friend Erwin Van Osen who was a theatre painter who also performed as a mime. Osen was interested in using the iconography of hysterics to create a 'pathological' style of painting and performance and he spent time studying and drawing the inmates of the Vienna Steinhof lunatic asylum. Frank Whitford cites Osen as an important influence, suggesting that Schiele's portraits of Osen "are typical of work he now produced for some considerable time: the face frozen in an expression of rapture, the thin body naked, the bony arms and hands contorted in a gesture of barely articulated emotion" (Whitford 1981: 70). Osen is however deliberately performing hysteria, not 'expressing' it, and he quotes the iconographic poses as part of his performance of an oppositional artistic identity. Schiele's adoption of hysterical imagery should also be considered as a surface enactment rather than an expression of some inner malaise and Anderson's choreography makes this explicit in that the contorted limbs, grimaces and anguished twisted torsos of the Featherstonehaughs enact the iconography of hysteria but perform it blankly with no suggestion that it is communicating an internal, feminised sexual disorder.



Reinhard Steiner argues that the depiction of distorted, grimacing bodies in Schiele's work is not an expressive use of the figure and face to suggest the internal life of a hysteric individual but rather these disfigured portraits should be considered as explicitly detailing a fracturing and alienation of the notion of a 'self'.

After his "Klimt period" – that is to say, from 1910 on – greater tension enters Schiele's self-portraits. From then till 1913 the expressive repertoire is used to excess, so that it is not always easy to see the pictures as self-portraits. They contest the defined clarity of a single individual who, for all the variety in his appearance, remains one and the same. The mirror is a distorting one now, the mirror image an alter ego, an alien self [...] The defamiliarization that is already in the pose struck in front of the mirror is matched in the drawings and paintings by a form which (viewed in terms of mimetic realism) parts company with the original subject. Yet this does not produce archaic authenticity, but rather a modern sense of the torn self. (Steiner 2000: 9)

I consider below the alienation of the mirror image but here it is important to note that it is an excess of expression during this period which makes the bodies of Schiele difficult to read as expressive of truth or a single autonomous self.

Anderson focuses on and multiplies the hysterical expressivity of the portraits in her choreography– in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* there is an excess of an excess of expression in the replication and proliferation of the distorted figures of Schiele. This registers over an hour of Schiele-esque movement which is multiplied across six bodies and collaged so as to produce layers of hysterical excess. In terms similar to Steiner, Klaus Schröder suggests that the compositional dissonance of expression in Schiele's portraiture further prevents their assimilation into traditional notions of self-expression. He argues that



Any attempt to compile a dictionary of Schiele's gestural repertoire would soon founder not only on the arbitrariness of the gestures but also on their inconsistency: the way in which the facial expression is out of kilter with the position of the hands. In Schiele, arms expansively outstretched often coexist with a blasé facial expression; conversely, a facial contortion may well appear without the expected expressive gestures of limbs and body. Although Schiele's figures are formally seamless unities, bound into one by the outline, their innate heterogeneity disrupts the habitually expected congruence between an individual's personality and the emotional aspects of his gestures and facial expressions. (Schröder 1999: 69)

Again this juxtaposition of expression is found in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* where Anderson collages these contradictory assemblages of gesture. Anderson's particular compositional strategies, discussed above, compound the already dissonant effect of Schiele's fragmented figures and thereby render the bodies of *The Featherstonehaughs* unreadable as unique expressive selves. For both Steiner and Schröder the arbitrary and defamiliarising use of conflicting expressions suggests that Schiele was less interested in authenticity or the probing of an original subjectivity in his portraits and was more concerned with the production of a modern notion of the self through reference to various iconographical images and through role playing. Steiner suggests that the portraits are "a theatre of the self" which portray Schiele as an artist similar to Friedrich Nietzsche's description from 1888:

The modern artist, physiologically close kin to the hysteric, bears the signs of hysteria in his very character too ... The absurd excitability of his constitution, which makes a crisis of every experience and drags drama into the merest chances of life, renders him utterly unpredictable: he is no longer one person, but at most a gathering of persons, and now this one, now that will be most conspicuous amongst them, with unabashed confidence. That



is precisely why he is a great actor: all these poor creatures lacking in will, these subjects for close medical scrutiny, are astounding for their mimic gifts, their powers of transfiguration, their ability to enter into any required character. (cited in Steiner 2000: 9-10)

The collection of images that Schiele portrays, and which appear in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*, therefore not only signify a decentred contemporary masculinity but also signify Schiele and Anderson as 'artists' in a Nietzschean sense – someone who is able to role-play and recite various characters. Schiele's dissonant mixture of attributes within the same portrait and Anderson's collaging of these together however maybe constitute an unfaithful reproduction which critiques the association of artists with hysterics that Nietzsche makes. Schiele's work does explore the theatricality of hysteria but not in order to show his physique as an indicator of a psychological disorder as suggested by Charcot, Breur and Freud. The self-portraits instead appropriate the gestures and contortions of the famous inmates of the Salpêtrière for the purposes of playing out the role of both hysteric and artist. Like Osen and Schiele, Anderson's reproduction of the imagery of hysteria is an oppositional practice of iconoclasm which troubles the connection between internal identity and external expressive movement and which suggests that artistic agency is to be located in the process of citation and reproduction rather than expressive authenticity. *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* does not promise the presence of the performer's identity in a form of expression but nor does it figure its absence as the never-seen doer behind the deed, concurring with another of Nietzsche's claims concerning subjectivity; "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything" (Nietzsche 1969: 45). In this piece the deed of dancing, of staging Egon Schiele's hysterical portraits is everything.



## 5.2b Masturbation

The second unity Foucault describes is that of the masturbating child and he notes that discourses on autoeroticism multiplied in the late nineteenth century as a major campaign was launched by educators, doctors and parents to eradicate this secret vice. The restriction and delineation of child sexuality was the aim and Schiele felt the force of this particular discourse when he was imprisoned in Neulengbach in 1912 on suspicion of corrupting children through allowing them access to his explicit pictures. Again however Foucault notes that rather than restrict child sexuality this explosion of discourse on masturbation served to produce the very notion of a secret, and therefore 'truthful', sexuality.

The idea was established of a sex characterized essentially by the interplay of presence and absence, the visible and the hidden; masturbation and the effects imputed to it were thought to reveal in a privileged way this interplay of presence and absence, of the visible and the hidden. (Foucault 1998:153)

Masturbation is therefore discursively understood through an idea of 'sex' as the inner truth which cannot be seen but only read through the visible signs on the surface of the body. Many of Schiele's self-portraits depicting masturbation, which Anderson reproduces in the 'naked' trio section of *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*, have been read according to this discursive play of presence and absence, visible and hidden, as signs of the existence of an internal repressed sexuality. *Eros – Nude Self-Portrait Masturbating (1911)* for example shows Schiele with a large engorged blood-red erection protruding out from his body, as if towards the viewer, with his fingers caressing the tip. Like all of Schiele's masturbatory self-portraits however this has a melancholic feel, with a gaunt face and blank stare on a head tilted almost in a gesture of sadness. This combination of the eroticism of masturbation with suggestions of death and pain causes many art historians to suggest that Schiele was depicting his torment by a repressive



society. Simon Wilson analyses these portraits as representing an act of truth, expressing the artist's auto-erotic drive in order to confront societal restrictions, but also as an act of self-sacrifice in that Schiele was revealing his own extreme frustration and suffering wrought by taboos and restrictions on sexual self-expression.

In these extraordinary drawings he elevates his own sexual feelings into a general comment on the distortions in modern civilised European society, in which sexual repression was (and to some extent still is) integral to the social structure. One result of predominantly Puritan social attitudes is that the individual is likely to develop feelings of conflict and guilt about his own sexuality, to the extent that when very powerful it can appear as a monstrous burden, a kind of martyrdom. (Wilson 1980: 27)

Alessandra Comini also links these portraits with a sense of compulsion and guilt – the angularity and rigid petrification of limbs suggest to her that Schiele's expression of sexual drives meets the self-disgust and punishment resulting from internalised prohibitions. Comini notes however that self-portraits involving masturbation were a major theme for Schiele from 1909 to 1912 asking, "Did Schiele really feel guilty about this activity, or was it not perhaps simply too spectacular a motif – with all its connotations of the suffering, feeling individual – to be passed up by an artist who wished both to be unusual and to shock an apathetic public?" (1974: 61). Indeed in May 1912 the Parisian public was shocked by the premiere of Nijinsky's ballet *L'Après-midi d'un faune* which contained a much-debated masturbatory thrust of the pelvis which was far less explicit than Schiele's drawings. Male masturbation therefore seemed to be a topic which aroused much interest in the early twentieth century from both moralists and artists alike. When Lea Anderson reproduced these portraits in 1998 there was little, if any, shock reaction. The poses drawn from the portraits do not have any special emphasis within the 'naked' trio and the audience are only pointed to the



autoeroticism of the movement through the device of Bock and Lee looking at O'Neill perform sexually for them in a proliferation of Schieles watching themselves for pleasure. Arguably however even in the late 1990's this constitutes an oppositional artistic deployment of masturbation since its status as a 'taboo' area of sexuality still persists.

Three years after Anderson's piece there was an explicit focus on masturbation in Michael Clark's *Before and After the Fall* (2001) attesting to the prevailing production of male masturbation as a site explored by controversial artists. The piece was produced in collaboration with the British artist Sarah Lucas, who designed a large forearm to be operated by onstage technicians to simulate the movements of masturbation with the female dancers standing in for the phallus. The dancers also have plastercast arm extensions which have a circled hand at the end which they use to simulate masturbation and there is also a film projected of the back view of a man masturbating (presumably not simulated). This excess of masturbation could be placed in the long line of Clark's 'shock tactics' which have included nudity, dildoes, Nazi salutes and drug references. Yet the masturbation both refers comically to the popular accusation of conceptual art as 'a load of wank', and also to Clark's iconographic choreography (which in the first half reworks some of his older pieces) as a form of eroticised self-indulgence. We are not invited to read the piece as an expression of Clark's sexual self-exploration in the face of taboos, not least because the choreography itself is stripped down and fairly formal ballet, danced by women. Whereas in 2001 it might not be as shocking as Schiele's portraits, or Nijinsky's pelvic thrust(s) were in 1912 (there was no scandalised booing when I saw it at Sadler's Wells) it still was playing upon a degree of shock and upon the notion of the artist, Clark, as a sexual subversive. Clark and Lucas's collaboration is however perhaps reflexive in that it figures both the scandalous and the metaphorical uses of 'masturbation' which is clearly put into inverted commas through hyperbole – the choreographer becomes a 'wanker',



someone who takes themselves too seriously or who indulges too much in the notion of an 'artist'.

Schiele was not however engaging in a reflexive irony in which he becomes a 'wanker' – his eroticism is deadly serious and is a key part of his assumption of the identity of 'artist-outsider'. Far from breaking taboos, the intertwining of auto-eroticised masculinity with other discourses to construct notions of the genius-as-outsider effectively produces and reinforces notions of a sexually repressive society which only grants access to erotic liberation to the male artists who are pathological or deviant enough to transgress. The reading of Schiele in terms of his martyr-like transgression of societal norms owing to his status as a suffering artist dissimulates the ways in which the sexual stylisation of the male body as an act of artistic genius reproduces these norms for the purpose of constructing an authentic masculine self. Whereas the paintings may have shocked and been transgressive, the adoption of the artist as an erotic pariah recirculates myths of masculine authorship and discourses of expression. The inner/outer distinction is reproduced both within the figure of the artist and in the binary of artist/society with the 'truth' of the artist expressing itself against the 'falsity' of an assumed repressive society. Although it could be argued that Lea Anderson therefore reproduces this myth in that her adoption of Schiele is contextualised both with reference to other deviant artists (Bowie and Iggy Pop in the score, The Divine David designing the make-up) and also by her own position as something of a cult figure within the British dance world, the choreography denies these narratives of the authenticity of the transgressive artist.

Anderson does not give emphasis to the masturbation pictures although they appear both in the life-model sketching section and in the 'naked' trio. The erotic figuration of the Featherstonehaughs cannot be rooted in a 'self' – neither the self-suffering or self-pleasuring of the dancers nor the construction of the authentic self of the choreographer and Anderson's refiguration of masturbation shares with



Michael Clark a subversive punkish reworking of the revered role of the artist-outsider. Anderson does not completely reject the role of a transgressive artist but instead rejects the authenticity and self-indulgence conventionally ascribed to such a position in favour of a reworking and recirculation of oppositional imagery and reverse sexual discourses.

### 5.2c The Couple and the Invert

The third and fourth unities identified by Foucault are those concerning the reproductive couple enmeshed in the economic regulation of the population, and that of the perverse adult, in particular the homosexual. Foucault argues that in the Victorian period the couple is produced and regulated according to the privileged husband-wife axis within the family and also the father-mother model of psychoanalysis. These are not sites which restrict sexuality but, on the contrary, are given to be the anchor points which initiate and support a range of discourses of 'sex'. Foucault also locates outside the sanctified family bond in this period the inauguration of the male homosexual as a recognisable type, famously citing 1870 as his 'birth', when the practice of sodomy changed from being regarded, and prosecuted, as a deviant act to being read as the evidence of a deviant identity.

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. (Foucault 1998: 43)



Like masturbation, homosexual sex was transformed from a practice into a visible sign of the hidden truth of sexual identity. Again in a play across presence and absence, surface and depth, discourses of sex produced the homosexual as a subject to be discovered, examined, pathologised and either cured or eradicated. Foucault notes however that this enabled in the early nineteenth century a reverse discourse whereby those described and brought into being by medical and judicial discourses on perversion took up and used the same language to argue for their recognition and freedom from persecution. The discourse of perversion is therefore never simply moving in one way but involves oppositional practices and reversals as part of the flow of power around the construct of homosexuality. Although Schiele did not identify as homosexual he nevertheless explored the iconography of the pervert as a form of figurative reverse discourse in the spiralling of sex in turn of the century Vienna. His depiction of the first two unities – the hysterical woman and the masturbating child – was complicated by the appearance of this imagery in self-portraits – he is deliberately playing the roles of the deviant types identified in Krafft-Ebing and the other sexological studies produced at this time. His portraits of the couple are also affected by this adoption of the sexual outlaw as often it is he and his mistress Wally, or his wife Edith that are portrayed (for example *Seated Couple* from 1915), but also there are lesbian couples and family portraits which suggest the kinds of sexual dynamics that Freud was later to explore as founding the modern subject. Whereas psychoanalysis found these relations of sexual power to be the universal experience behind an entrance into subjectivity, Schiele suggests that there are multiple possibilities for role-play and erotic reverse discourse.

Anderson reproduces these pictures of couples in the duet for Eddie Nixon and Stephen Kirkham in painted ‘naked’ bodysuits. Like the duet from *The Hypochondriac Bird*, discussed in the previous chapter, this section of choreographic coupling is not a celebration of sex but rather a reflexive staging of ‘sex’ as a discursive production. In the duet Anderson displaces the heterosexuality



of Schiele's portraits (the lesbian pictures are arguably heterosexual erotica rather than depictions of lesbian sexuality) onto a seemingly male homosexual couple. Nixon and Kirkham play out the various explicit positions of Schiele's couples as they caress and drape their bodies around each other, moving into different positions with a kind of urgent yet languid intensity. Unlike *The Hypochondriac Bird*, this duet does not establish a sexual rhythm and there is little thrusting or mimicking of the motions of sex. The duet moves fluidly through the portraits such as *Coitus* (1915) where Nixon lies on his back and wraps his legs around the pelvis of Kirkham, his hands are on Kirkham's back and his face, framed by Kirkham's hands, is facing out to the audience, (in terms of the portrait, Nixon is Edith to Kirkham's Egon but this is reversed when they repeat the image). This pose is registered for a fraction of a second only by the dancers' gaze out to the audience then it dissolves, and they melt sinuously into another image, rolling across each other and manipulating each others bodies into a wide range of Schiele's couples.

This duet could only work as a form of parody or even drag if the viewer could read the heterosexuality, or lesbianism, of the couple image against the apparent male homosexuality of the performers but Anderson's disruption does not occur across a boundary between homosexual and heterosexual identities. Nor does it present an 'in-your-face' performance of gay sexuality similar to that in Javier de Frutos's work. Rather it reveals the performativity of desire and the discursive production of both the couple and the homosexual to be recitations. The staging of the duet reveals how 'sex' is an enactment, a quotation of positions and eroticised surfaces rather than the expression of a sexual identity. It is of no concern whether Kirkham and Nixon are 'really' homosexual or not since they are staging both desire and sex, and even their 'nudity' is a surface enactment and not 'real'. Whereas Javier de Frutos's nudity could be read by critics as an exposure not only of his body but of a truth about his identity, the stylised naked bodysuits of The Featherstonehaughs do not reveal 'true' or 'authentic' male bodies and their reproduced images of sex do not present 'real' desire or the breaking of sexual



repression by truthful expressions of psycho-sexual drives. The theatricality and superficiality of the duet does not however disguise or mask these 'truths' of sex but stages them as citational performatives, as acts, gestures and enactments figured on the surface of the body.

Anderson's reproduction of the sexual discourses surrounding Schiele's portraiture therefore emphatically deconstructs the notion of a truth of sex that resides in the interior psychological landscape of an individual. Foucault's four unities of sexual knowledge are recirculated in the choreography but as surface effects that do not express a depth nor signify an authenticity blighted by a repressive society. The notion of repression is not entirely discountable however and I want to turn now to consider the images of death and suffering in Schiele's work and Anderson's reworkings in terms of the *unheimlich* effects of reflection. Whereas Freud describes the *unheimlich* as the return of the repressed I want to examine how the abject, unsettling figures which inhabit Anderson's piece allegorise the production of homosexuality as that which must be repeatedly repressed in the reification of hegemonic masculine ideals. I will then turn to consider how the Featherstonehaughs' reflection of a queered gaze back to the audience further unsettles masculine normativity and both comments upon the performativity of desire and its potential refiguration to include the fragmentary hysterical homosexual bodies which are the unspeakable and illegitimate spectres of masculinity.

#### 5.4 Reflection

When Anderson reworked *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* for the camera the working title was 'Mirror Man' (it eventually became *The Lost Dances of Egon Schiele*) and the reason behind this initial name is established in the first shot, which reframes some of the movement from the first



main sequence of the live piece. At first we see hands enter into shot, with the familiar splayed fingers from Schiele's gestural repertoire, then two figures, Eddie Nixon and Luca Silvestrini, enter the frame pulling quickly into a profile pose with the arms above the head, with hands linked to form a diamond shape. This is not from a painting or drawing but a photograph of Schiele taken by Anton Trcka in 1914 which Schiele then overpainted. It is part of a series of photographs where Schiele adopts the gestures and grimaces of his painted figures, where he becomes his own painted likeness. Anderson stages this act of self-reproduction so as to suggest that Silvestrini is Nixon's mirrored reflection, the image is effectively doubled, and they move in unison, switching the direction of the pose rapidly then tilting the torso backwards before turning to face each other with the upper torso hunched and the arms curved asymmetrically at crooked angles (similar to *Nude Leaning on His Elbow, Seen from the Back* 1910). The gaze of the dancers upon their mirrored likeness is then slowly redirected towards the camera as Nixon smoothly turns his head and Silvestrini shifts the position of his eyes, the deliberate emphasis of the movement suggests they know 'we' are watching them and Anderson thereby identifies the guilty camera as the seeing substitute for the voyeuristic eye of the viewer. They walk backwards, maintaining the stare and then the duet splits as Nixon turns and sinks to the floor. The direct eye contact with the viewer continues unbroken as the camera circles Nixon while he shifts sensuously through Schiele's imagery. Dan O'Neill slides into the main frame effectively becoming another double image as he performs the same movement as Nixon, although the camera alternates between who is foregrounded, effectively confusing the image/reflection distinction. In the background Rem Lee and Silvestrini cross, again performing a duet in unison finishing with the camera sliding away from them in a doubled reproduction of *The Fighter* (1913); the arms are held in a tense pugilist gesture contrasted with the facial gesture of pursed lips. The camera returns to the Nixon and O'Neill duet briefly before moving past them towards the small figure of Stephen Kirkham who emerges briefly out of darkness then sinks away.



This short opening shot (partially repeated in reverse for the end of the film) is all in one take and produces a disorientating sense of a desiring, wandering gaze which does not frame the space or the dancers moving in it as a whole, nor does it mimic the frontal presentation of a stage, but moves through and amongst the choreography, lingering over some details and moving rapidly past others. The film emphasises the active role of vision which was explicitly investigated in the live piece by the dancers staging the dynamics of looking within the square of light and addressing the desiring gaze directed on them from the darkened auditorium. This attention to visual presentation and reception in both versions<sup>7</sup> can be divided into two main thematic explorations of reflection; the double and the returned gaze and I want to turn to consider these in terms of Anderson's attention to the performativity of desire and the production of the self through identification. The staging of the *doppelgänger*s, mirror images, dolls and blank corpse-like stares of Schiele's figures will be considered using Freud's discussion of the *unheimlich*, or uncanny, in his essay *The Uncanny (Das Unheimliche)* written in 1919 a year after Schiele had died. The uncanny "is something which is secretly familiar (*heimlich-heimisch*), which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (*P.F.L.* 14: 368)<sup>8</sup>. The privileged repression according to Freud is that of castration anxiety but I will argue that what returns in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* are the *unheimlich* abject figures produced by hegemonic masculine norms. Anderson's choreographic reproduction of these figures, and her stress on the desiring attachments and investments involved in their manifestation, addresses the political potential of the *unheimlich* for rearticulating and reconfiguring both the familiar and the strange, the normal and the unnatural and therefore opens up the notion of 'masculinity' to unexpected and subversive reworkings.



## 5.4a The Double

A recognisable feature of all of Anderson's choreography to date is her deployment of complex patterns of unison where various sequences are simultaneously performed and the dancers segue between them, moving in and out of synchronicity with each other, switching affiliations to create elaborate visual and spatial designs. Very rarely do either *The Cholmondeleys* or *The Featherstonehaughs* perform solo material and movement is most often introduced then deconstructed through repetition, reversal and fragmentation. This compositional characteristic compounds the effects of the self-reflexive, intertextual reproduction discussed above because the imagery is replicated across several bodies and it cannot be read as pertaining to one 'self' but as a shared cultural repertoire. Sherril Dodds links this to the postmodern proclamation of the 'death of the subject'<sup>9</sup>;

There is no suggestion of individual depth or character psychology, but rather a series of interchangeable, mass-produced images that are placed on the dancers for no apparent reason other than to display a particular 'look'...Each predetermined subject goes through identical activities, which are not the product of some unique self but a series of acquired patterns of behaviour...Although each dancer may appear distinct on a superficial level, by using identical, unison formations and prescribed movement patterns Anderson is challenging notions of individualism. (Dodds 1999: 219-220)

Although this challenge to individualism can be discerned in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*, the subject is not quite pronounced 'dead', or rather it is haunted by its death, and the choreography explores how 'the self' as an internalised product of identifications comes to be constituted and how this constitution is always partial and troubled by its own incompleteness. Similarly the oft repeated postmodern 'death of the author', cited



by Dodds as a key component of Anderson's work, is revisited here as both Schiele and Anderson haunt the piece since the choreography both cites them as the creative agency behind the physical imagery and yet situates this agency as the performative force of a chain of iterations and reproductions. Foucault suggests that "It is not enough, ... to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared... Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" (Foucault 1991: 105). It is in the spaces and elisions of masculine subject formation that Anderson locates her figures and stages the uncanny return of the 'self' and the 'author'.

One of the main components of the choreography for both the stage and film version of *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* is the duet form. As in many previous works, Anderson duplicates her movement language, often juxtaposing unison material on incongruous pairs, such as Frank Bock and Rem Lee, the tallest and the shortest of *The Featherstonehaughs* respectively. In this work the duet assumes a particular resonance since one of the main motifs of Schiele's portraits, together with that of the couple discussed above, is that of the doubled self and Anderson replicates his imagery of the Self-Seers, doppelgängers and mirror images. Steiner suggests that these series of double images in Schiele's work result from his practice of taking himself as the theme of his work since to 'explore the self is always to render the self a duality, though, since the subject conducting the exploration is also its object' (Steiner 2000: 13). The notion of the doubled self was a popular theme of late nineteenth-century fiction, with perhaps the most enduring double being that of Jekyll and Hyde from Robert Louis Stevenson's novel in 1886, and it was closely associated with hysteria. Julia Borossa notes that there was "a conception of the human being as split between a conscious, moral self, and something other, irrational, problematic, which needed to be reined in... Presenting a split or multiple personality began to feature prominently among the hysterical patients' irrational symptoms, and was explained as a marker of the



tenuousness of their rational, controlling and in-control self” (Borossa 2001: 14). Schiele’s interest in hysteria also led him to explore the doppelgänger and Steiner suggests that Schiele’s painting thematised the self-conflict and self-annihilation of hysterical doubling.

The most important is his 1910 painting *The Self-Seers*. (There is a second version, painted in 1911, which is also known as *Death and Man*.) The *Self-Seers* title is initially bewildering because it does not readily seem to identify the content of the picture. The figures in the painting, both vaguely identifiable as Schiele himself, are not looking at each other but rather frontally at us as we look at the picture: that is to say, if we presuppose the presence of a mirror image, the painter is looking at himself, and the title thus concerns Schiele’s relation with his own painting – the painting redoubles the mirror image of his own self. (Steiner 2000: 14)

This multiplication of the duplicated self is reworked in Anderson’s choreography when duets slide in and out of quartets and when movement is exchanged between couples. In the simultaneous duets section of the live piece the dancers assume the awkward embraces of *The Self-Seers* or *The Prophets* (1911) with Bock and Silvestrini upstage left and Kirkham and Lee downstage right. Lee leaves the stage and Kirkham continues to echo the duet of Bock and Silvestrini but as a strangely unsettling solo. Anderson’s uncanny reworking of the encounters with the self echoes Freud’s suggestion that the development of the ego can be traced through doubles, through encounters with other figures which reveal how the self is constituted through reflection;

The subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. (*P.F.L.* 14: 356)



The choreography repeats this doubling, dividing and interchanging but does so to unsettle the location of the self. As each of The Featherstonehaughs effectively 'becomes' the other and reflects themselves in performing the mirror image of another, Anderson does not suggest that 'the subject' is dead but rather that it is constituted through performative restagings of identifications. These duets and the identificatory processes they stage invoke the possibility of death since they are always figured as incomplete and fragmentary and any notion of wholeness is fleeting and tenuous. In the duets section the loss of the partner becomes a loss of self which suggests that the redoubling of the self is therefore a redoubling of its loss and the piece stages a haunting of the self-present sovereign subject with its undoing. Freud suggests that originally it is comforting for the child to find itself everywhere but this pleasure turns to horror as the double comes to represent the loss of authenticity or autonomy and therefore the death of the true self.

For the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an energetic denial of the power of death... But when this stage has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.  
(*P.F.L.* 14: 356-7)

Freud argues that the *unheimlich* effect of the double stems from the unsettling feeling of being watched, dealt with in more detail below, which replicates the ever watchful eye of the super-ego. He describes the incorporation of an ideal image of the self to be used by the super-ego, "which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our 'conscience'" (*P.F.L.* 14: 357). The image of the double therefore reproduces the image of the self-berating ego ideal, the better version of the self which causes feelings of inadequacy and failure. This role of the double is taken up by Lacan in



his discussion of the Mirror Stage (1949) where he describes the development of the individual according to its encounter with its reflection, which is perceived as ideal and to which the child is inadequate. The subject is, as a result, attached to images of coherence and containment in order to disguise the fragmentation it experiences – this identification is however never fully assumed and the fragmented body haunts the subject with “a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual ...in the form of disjointed limbs” (Lacan 2001: 5). Indeed, as I discuss in chapter three in relation to the relation of the Prince and the Swan, the bodily unity promised by the ideal image is only ever tenuously achieved and identification it always haunted by its failure.

The ideal image is impossible to approach except in moments of mania or delusion. For the most part, the subject who yearns to approximate it experiences not repletion but insufficiency, not wholeness, but discordance and disarray. He or she vaguely apprehends the irreducible heterogeneity of the bodily ego, the distance of his or her proprioceptive coordinates from the specular ideal, but only via the extremely dystopic fantasy of the body in bits and pieces. (Silverman 1996: 39)

It is precisely this fragmented body which appears in Schiele's work and which is explored in Anderson's choreography but rather than analyse these figures as representative of Schiele's, or Anderson's, personal inability to be the perfect ideal I want to suggest that the work can be read as allegorising the workings of normative idealisation. If *Swan Lake* yearns for the smooth ideal fetish of the Swan then the choreographic doubling in *The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* exposes how ideal masculine identity and a coherent bodily unity is assumed upon the foreclosure of homosexual attachments which come to signal the undoing of the subject and its deadly fall into bodily disintegration. As such Anderson is choreographing an oppositional deployment of the fragmented body which critiques



the demands of culturally valued ideal images of heterosexual masculinity – something Schröder suggests Schiele was doing in his self portraits;

Schiele sets the ideal dialogue of self-infatuation in motion, only to wreck it at once...Schiele's narcissistic ego is deformed. Scrawny and repellent, with its high forehead, its elongated neck, its bulky laborer's hands, its obscenely semierect member, it flouts not only and every antique ideal but the entire concept of an "artworthy" body, as understood at the turn of the century. (Schröder 1995: 53)

Unlike Matthew Bourne's choreography for *Swan Lake*, Anderson does not attempt to deal with the melancholic foreclosure of grief through fetishised, ideal bodies but through the uncanny return of the hysterical fragmented body in the reproduction of Schiele's deformed self image. The abject double in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* is not therefore an ideal itself but the mutilated result of its critical capacity, the violence of which has reduced the handsome Schiele, and the handsome Featherstonehaughs, into wretched deformed figures. The fragmented bodies are therefore allegorically rendered guilty and lacking, unable to approximate the culturally proscribed perfection of masculine norms. In *The Ego and The Id*, Freud discusses how the super-ego is a form of socialised guilt whose attacks on the ego can have dire consequences particularly in cases of melancholia where "the super-ego can become a kind of gathering-place for the death instincts" (*P.F.L.* 11: 395), eventually driving the subject to suicide. The double therefore wields the terrifying force of the super ego and the death drive – indeed, echoing Freud's terminology, Steiner suggests that in Schiele's works "the pale and shadowy alter-ego is a threatening harbinger of death" (Steiner 1990: 14). This power of the conscience to undo the self, represented by the uncanny terror of the double, is directly linked by Freud to repressed desire and in particular homosexual desire. In 'On Narcissism', written in



1914, Freud suggests that both the subject and its conscience are formed through the deflection of homosexuality;

large amounts of libido of an essentially homosexual kind are drawn into the formation of the narcissistic ego ideal and find outlet and satisfaction in maintaining it. The institution of conscience was at bottom an embodiment, first of parental criticism, and subsequently of that of society.( *P.F.L.* 11: 90)

As discussed in chapter two, Judith Butler suggests this is not a repression of desire but a preservation of certain attachments as mandatory losses and she diagnoses gender as a form of cultural melancholia where socially unavowed homosexual attachments are preserved in the practice of self-beratement. Masculinity is an impossible achievement, an ego-ideal to which any subject is never equal and it is preserved through foreclosed love – a man strives to assume the manliness that he cannot desire. This is not the disappearance of that desire however but its preservation;

The prohibition does not seek the obliteration of prohibited desire; on the contrary, prohibition pursues the reproduction of prohibited desire and becomes itself intensified through the renunciations it effects. The afterlife of prohibited desire takes place through the prohibition itself, where the prohibition not only sustains, but is *sustained by*, the desire that it forces into renunciation. In this sense, then, the renunciation takes place *through* the very desire that is renounced, which is to say that the desire is *never* renounced, but becomes preserved in the very structure of preservation. (Butler 1997a: 117 emphasis in original)

If, as Freud suggests, the uncanny is the return of the repressed then the return of prohibited homosexuality, as the precondition for heterosexual masculine subjectivity, can wield the threat of the uncanny. This would not however simply be



the avowal of repressed desire or the emergence of a discrete homosexual subjectivity but an unsettling of the notion of repression and the uprooting of the hegemonic burial of homosexuality as the lost attachment at the entry into cultural life. In short the double is a spectral return which displaces the ontology of the subject with a hauntological uncertainty, indeed Freud notes that *unheimlich* is sometimes translated into 'haunted'.<sup>10</sup>

The more common translation of the German *unheimlich* into the English *uncanny* loses what Freud explores as the ambiguity of the meanings of *heimlich*, which he sets out at the beginning of his essay. *Heimlich* can mean 'homely' and 'familiar' and also 'friendly', 'tame' and 'comfortable' but it can also mean 'concealed', 'unknown' and 'inaccessible' and in fact Freud suggests that "*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*" (P.F.L. 14: 347). The *unheimlich* is not a simple opposition of all that is *heimlich* therefore but a disruption and disturbance of the very notion of naming and locating the familiar, which according to Freud is always already sliding into the concealed and the sinister. Despite his avowal of the ambiguity of the *unheimlich*, and despite his exploration of Hoffmann's story *The Sand-Man*<sup>11</sup>, Freud nevertheless separates 'real' strangeness from 'fictional', arguing that "we should differentiate between the uncanny that we actually experience and the uncanny that we merely picture or read about" (P.F.L., 14: 370). Julia Kristeva notes that in Freud's reading, "artifice neutralizes uncanniness and makes all returns of the repressed plausible, acceptable and pleasurable" (Kristeva 1991: 187). This distinction of the 'artificial uncanny' from the 'real uncanny' has echoes in J.L. Austin's rejection of theatrical citation, which renders it "*in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage*" (Austin 1976: 22 emphasis in original). Just as I have argued that performativity cannot finally sustain this distinction of the real and the artificial, so too the *unheimlich*, which is after all a peculiar kind of citation, disturbs the discrete categorisation of reality and



fiction. Hélène Cixous (1976) argues that Freud's essay actually extends the notion of fiction, rather than contains it – as Masschelein suggests;

The essay [*Das Unheimliche*] is read as a piece of fiction, and Freud's claims on truth are systematically undermined and deconstructed through strategies of parody and mimicry. Thus, Cixous raises the (typically deconstructive) question of whether one can ultimately distinguish between reality and fiction when the subjective element that characterizes any act of reading and interpretation is not limited to fiction but effects any attempt at interpretation, even if it presents itself as scientific. (Masschelein 2002: 62)

Anderson's choreography, with similar strategies of mimicry, draws attention to the homoeroticism of Schiele's doubles and the autoerotic pleasures of seeing oneself duplicated but does so in the ambivalent manner of the *unheimlich* and we do not see desiring subjects but an ambiguous figuration of the melancholia of gendered subjectivity. There is no clear sense of reality behind the artifice of the citation of Schielesque movement and the unsettling effect of the piece arises precisely from this ambivalence. The familiar is rendered strange and the demands of normative masculinity are replayed so as to appear grotesque. The film version in particular, with its emphasis on the exchange of blank looks between the dancers and between them and the camera, unsettles any clear distinction between identification and desire and suggests that the process of reflection, of doubling, is a return from what Butler calls 'the afterlife of prohibited desire' which recites and deforms the renunciation itself. This defamiliarisation extends from the reproduction of Schiele's imagery into the self-reflexive reproduction of the expected image of The Featherstonehaughs – the 'familiar blokeishness' cited by the critics is interrupted by eldritch abject figures. Judith Mackrell suggests that the section where the men walk with their hands in their pockets shows glimpses of the 'old' Featherstonehaughs but this is taken from the photograph, taken by Johannes Fischer in 1915, of Schiele looking at himself in his large studio mirror, staring at



his reflective double. In quoting herself through Schiele, Anderson suggests that what was taken as the familiarity of the Featherstonehaughs was always already *unheimlich*.

Ramsay Burt discusses the blank stares of earlier Featherstonehaughs pieces in *The Male Dancer* and suggests that Anderson's choreography worked according to a strategy of infiltration in which The Featherstonehaughs appear like a cool rock band through their deadpan humour but within their performances they subvert this coolness to critique the structures of masculinity they are representing. Burt quotes Anderson as saying, "Just get everyone all buddy buddy, get everyone all nice and relaxed, you know – the Featherstonehaughs, all nice and accessible – and then just start to make them uncomfortable" (1995: 169). Burt suggests that this uncomfortable challenge to the buddy-buddy images (he examines a section of *Jeux Sans Frontière* from 1991) is raised by Anderson's use of male-male contact duets and is emphasised by the blankness or depthlessness, which Burt suggests "denies the sensuous materiality of the body" (1995: 170). He argues that the duets at the end of the piece have a disconnected and unnatural effect;

what might ordinarily appear 'ordinary' male behaviour is made to look decidedly odd. It is clearly an example of Anderson using 'normal' male behaviour to make the audience feel uncomfortable. Anderson is knowingly presenting male behaviour that may be approved in certain contexts but censured in others. This is because there is no clear dividing line between on the one hand an approved and necessary ability for men to work closely with, and be interested in, other men, and, on the other hand, gay desire. (Burt 1995: 169-170)

Burt therefore detects what I would identify as the *unheimlich* in The Featherstonehaughs' blank stares. The eyes do not reflect the presence of someone 'behind' the performance, nor do they express homosexual desire, but



signal the deconstruction of the expressive model of gender identity and perform an uncanny recitation of the prohibition on masculine identifications. *The Featherstonehaughs Draw On The Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* contains the same depthlessness and blankness as previous works but does not however contain any buddy-buddy moments – the dancers are never brought together as a group in the same way as in earlier pieces. Also the images of masculinity drawn by Schiele and drawn on by Anderson are individual, abject and melancholic rather than homosocial or normatively ‘masculine’ and the piece moves away from the misconstrued comfortable image of *The Featherstonehaughs* as ‘ordinary blokes’. The piece does not first establish masculine imagery only in order to unsettle it – rather it focuses upon the *unheimlich* from the outset and details the impossibility of either achieving or completely refusing coherent masculine identity. It repeats, doubles and haunts with the disavowed figures of horror and perversity that haunt ‘male’ bodies. This suggests that the homosocial/homosexual boundary is rendered always already ambiguous since these figures play out the refused identifications constituent of homosociality and reveal how homosocial masculinity requires the abjection and ungrievable loss of homosexuality.

Although I have employed here a particular use of the notion of the *unheimlich* I do not mean to suggest that the only effects of the *Featherstonehaughs*’ performance are disturbing and haunting. The ambivalence of the word *unheimlich* that Freud identifies carries over into the ambivalence of the figures played out across the choreography – they are unsettling and unnatural but they also evoke the familiarity and desirability that was characteristic of earlier work. The appeal of the *Featherstonehaughs* is rendered strange through an *unheimlich* repeat of their image, but they *are* still appealing and I turn now to consider the direction of a desiring gaze onto the uncanny multiple fragmented bodies how the reflection of this gaze back to the audience opens up the question of ideality and the future reworkings of masculine subjectivity.



## 5.4b The Returned Gaze

In *The Show* (1989) and *Big Feature* (1991), The Featherstonehaughs first two evening length shows, Anderson strung together various short pieces, each with individual names, which were introduced by one of the dancers from the side of stage. Talking casually into a microphone, the Featherstonehaugh gave his first name and then the name of the piece, maybe explaining a little about what the piece was about or how it got the title. This direct address to the audience continued into the choreography which was always directed frontally to the audience with the dancers looking out with detached gazes. Sherril Dodds suggests that this type of 'cool' address is both a deconstruction of the bloated style of much self-important contemporary dance and "a forthright invitation for the audience to deconstruct the multi-coded references manifest in Anderson's work" (Dodds 1999: 222-23). As discussed above, Ramsay Burt also argues that the blank stares of The Featherstonehaughs serve to deconstruct notions of gendered presentation and I suggested that in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* the detached stares have an *unheimlich*, rather than 'cool', effect. Here I want to consider how the uncanny address nevertheless invites the audience to recognise their own desiring position as spectators of the abject figures from Schiele's work. The challenge to the audience in earlier works has therefore developed so that the spectator needs to deconstruct their own investment in the choreography rather than simply read the cultural references. Anderson reveals that the desiring gaze is integral to the production, and reproduction, of the discourses of sexuality and identity recirculated through her replication of Schiele's portraits.

There are no interludes with talking, and no introductions in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* but the piece does figure the direct address to the audience as one of its major themes. The



section where this is most pronounced is during the 'life class' where Bock, Lee and Silvestrini hold a pose, in a matter-of-fact way shift into another, remove an item of clothing or move into a group portrait whilst staring out. The sounds of a pencil scratching on paper in the score highlights the impression of a deliberate posing of the three dancers to be sketched out by an external eye. In terms of Schiele's portraits they become the models and the audience become the artist and yet rather than simply explain or tell the story of how these portraits were arrived at this scene implicates the audience in the act of viewing – the audience is made aware of the power dynamics of spectatorship and its unmarked position in the dark is brought into the light (metaphorically) and reflected upon. Like the nudity of Javier de Frutos, this explicit posing forces a reflection upon the erotics of watching bodies and thereby breaks the 'hidden' voyeurism of spectatorship. Yet even this focus on the complicity of the viewer in the stylised performances on stage could be seen to be a quote from Schiele – Schröder suggests that his paintings break with the voyeuristic style of the Secessionists, especially Gustav Klimt;

Where Klimt's models hardly ever catch the voyeur's eye, Schiele's women give us an unblinking stare. The viewer of Schiele's nudes is not really a voyeur at all; the situation staged by Schiele, that of modelling in his studio, has nothing secret about it...in Klimt's drawings he conceals himself behind his own pictorial idea, and behind the fantasy of secretly eavesdropping on an erotic act; in Schiele, the artist is always there. Not only the portraits but the nudes, even the back views, react with and offer themselves to the viewer ...Schiele makes the process of observation his theme, by giving thematic status to the observer. In his contrived perspective, the directionality of the artist's gaze – and of the viewer's, however many decades later – is reestablished every time. (Schröder 1999: 110 – 114)



Anderson's work could be said to give thematic status to the observer in that her attention has always been on a flattened perspective which plays with the notion of presentation. In this piece in particular, she constructs a self-reflexive piece of performance by explicitly drawing attention to the politics of the act of spectatorship. The film version is particularly unsettling in this respect in that the camera does not peer unseen into a pre-existing scene but has its gaze returned by the dancers, suggesting that the performance is explicitly staged for the benefit of the viewer. If the hysterical iconography of Schiele's figures cites a melodramatic refusal of the 'fourth wall' of realist theatre then the staging, and the filming, continue this disruption of normative representational strategies by identifying the desire of the spectator as the motivation for the choreography, rather than the expression of the true identity of the performer. This reflexivity disrupts the inner/outer distinction and an expressive model of gender - the audience are not invited to perceive a hidden identity behind these postures but to reflect upon their own relationship to the stylisation of the bodies on stage. The returned gaze destroys any notion of a straightforward realistic representation, offered up passively for consumption and is instead a direct challenge to recognise the complicity of the viewer in the construction of these stylised bodies.

In interview Anderson suggested that the purpose of the 'life drawing' section was to make the audience uncomfortable with these poses and particularly with the focus on 'male' bodies. She commented that *The Cholmondeleys* were financed at first by the three founder members; Theresa Barker, Gaynor Coward and herself, working as life models and she wanted to explore the dynamics of this experience of being looked at and being reproduced as a feminine object. The Featherstonehaughs replicate the erotic poses of the female models of Schiele's portraits and situate themselves in the traditionally feminine role as passive object of the gaze. As discussed in chapter two, feminist scholarship on the gaze often ascribes to it a 'male' characteristic but I argue this reproduces a heterosexual division between identification and desire wherein the male audience member



identifies only with the idealised man and desires only the ideal woman. By placing men as the object of an eroticised gaze Anderson is not however simply reversing this and producing an erotic spectacle for women in the audience but is explicitly examining this logic of the gaze and suggesting that the exchange of looks, both desiring and identificatory, is an integral part of the performative figuration of subjectivity. This is most pronounced in the section where O'Neill turns and performs a 'naked' solo for the watching eyes of Lee and Bock. This is the only part of the piece where the dancing is not directed outwards although O'Neill frequently turns his head towards the audience to implicate them in the scene. David Dougill's review for *The Sunday Times* describes the effect of this internalised staging of the gaze;

Two of the "suits" reappear as voyeurs of fleshed-out Dan O'Neill's calculated gyrations, thrusts, and twists: there are crotch-clutchings, grapple-twinings, and snapshot-hints at copulation. Again, each position refers to a Schiele picture. We are cast as voyeurs, too, at a second remove, watching both the watchers and watched. (Dougill 1998a: 8)

What Dougill doesn't mention, and neither do any of the other reviewers, is that the redoubled voyeuristic gaze is constructed as ambiguously narcissistic and homosexual. There are two clothed 'Schieles' watching another of themselves, 'naked' performing sexualised movements and, although there is no pleasure registered on their faces, their bodies lean forward intently and their gaze directs the audience to the eroticised dancing body. In effect members of the audience see themselves looking and see that the gaze they are directing on these bodies is neither disinterested nor heterosexual. Regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the individual audience member, Anderson (who is after all a straight woman) renders the gaze as constructing a particular kind of male homosexuality which queers the distinction between identification and desire to find pleasure in the processes of self-replication.



Diana Fuss has examined Freud's particular anxieties concerning group hysteria as based in the challenges staged by these multiple excessive bodies to the roles of spectatorship and analysis. In the surroundings of girls schools or female hospital wards hysteria is figured as a contagious overidentification, caught through looking at other bodies.

In the phenomenon of group hysteria, the hysteric is not merely the object of interested medical study, as in Charcot's theatrical demonstrations, but its subject as well. The hysteric is both a participant in the ensemble performance and a spectator of the performances of the other group members. Spectatorship actually constitutes the point of entry *into* the illness, blurring the line between medical surveillance and pathological performance, between healthy doctor and sick patient. (Fuss 1995: 115-116 emphasis in original)

If, as I have argued, *The Featherstonehaughs* are performing something like group hysterics then the thematics of looking within the piece emphasise the possibility of being contaminated by the gaze – not only for the performers but also for the implicated audience. The *unheimlich* symptoms of hysteria refuse to be isolated in one body and identification and mimetic desire are foregrounded as infectious doubling spreads virally before the audience's desiring eyes. Furthermore, unlike the idealisation of signifiers of dominant masculinity found in much mainstream gay clone culture, and in the cloned swan-men of AMP's *Swan Lake*, the 'cloning' here surrounds the pleasures of the abject and the lure of the disintegrating body. Whereas both Freud and Lacan argue that the spectre of the fragmentary body can only bring terror and the death-like experience of a loss of coherence, Anderson is suggesting that the multiple Schiele-esque figures can offer potential reconfigurations both of masculine subjectivity and of desire.



Kaja Silverman argues that subjectivity cannot proceed without the production and circulation of ideal images but she suggests that our current cultural bodily norms need to be resisted and redrawn not only to allow undervalued bodies to operate as ideal but to draw attention to the very process of idealisation.

We need to learn how to idealize oppositionally and provisionally... We need visual texts which activate in us the capacity to idealize bodies which diverge as widely as possible both from ourselves and from the cultural norm. Those representations should also be ones which do not at the same time work to naturalize the end result of that psychic activity in a way that might be ultimately productive simply of new, reified ideals. The bodily representations which I am imagining here are ones that would not so much incarnate ideality as wear it, like a removable cloak. (Silverman 1996: 37)

I propose that *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* is precisely this sort of visual text which encourages a provisional and reflexive idealisation of bodies outside the cultural norms of heterosexual masculine coherence. It figures this idealisation at once desiring and identificatory and it reflects back to the audience through the returned gaze both their complicity in the production of dancing bodies and the potentials for reinscribing different parameters for subjectivity outside the current melancholic insistence on masculine autonomy and bodily unity.

## 5.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that Lea Anderson's choreography in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* performs a critique of notions of interiority and particularly of 'sex' as a truth which is expressed through the body. Anderson insistently figures the acts, gestures and



enactments which are played out across the bodies of The Featherstonehaughs as surface stylisations which do not hide an identity but rather stage it as the composite effect of layered surfaces. Anderson draws particular attention to the status of gender performances as citations and offers an excess of reproduced images to counter notions of authentic subjectivity and original sexuality. In doing so she encounters the deaths of both the subject and the author, whose mutual demise is pronounced by much postmodern theory, but Anderson suggests that the agency of the subject and the author is to be found in the citational moments of performative identity and as such can be reworked to allow for an oppositional artistic practice which does not rely upon notions of repressed authenticity. The abject, fragmentary figures that Anderson draws from Schiele's sketch books are *unheimlich* returns of the melancholic spectres of normative masculinity and the choreography marks an oppositional deployment of ideality and desirability which revisits the fragmentary body as a potential site for reimagined provisional and reflexive subjectivities.

In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler suggests that 'the body' is brought to being through the sedimentation of the history of performatives and in doing so it becomes naturalised, but this can be interrupted and disrupted, allowing for an articulation of subjectivity that acknowledges failures and repeats norms in order to reveal their naturalisation.

In...bodily productions resides the sedimented history of the performative, the ways in which sedimented usage comes to compose, without determining, the cultural sense of the body, and how the body comes to disorient that cultural sense in the moment of expropriating the discursive means of its own production. The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds a future through a break with the past. (Butler 1997a: 159)



Although Butler is here referring to spoken utterances, Anderson's citation of the visual images from Egon Schiele suggests that bodily performances can be expropriated and disoriented from their normative sedimented use. When Anderson asks The Featherstonehaughs to reproduce and reflect upon the impossible choreographies of Schiele's figures she is breaking with the past of masculine stylisation and its normative effect and strategically using the disruptive potential of this bodily production to break with normative notions of masculinity and identity. Indeed if hysteria is a problematisation of the history of the body then Anderson's revisitation of the historical bodies of hysterical iconography, via Schiele, repeats and intensifies the insurrectionary moments of a hysterical 'return of the repressed'. The sedimented disavowal of homosexual attachments and the melancholic incorporation of this to form masculinity is exposed as a social performative which requires ratification by the gaze of the other. Anderson directs a gaze which is both identificatory and desiring onto the deformed results of the super-egoic insistence on ideality and unity and suggests that these *unheimlich* hysterical bodies can be used to deconstruct the very ideals that would expel them as abject. In the melancholic logic of idealisation, 'men' are masculine because they never loved and never lost other men, and they become men through an 'incorporation' of this never-never attachment which is in fact a form of playing out the homosexual desire as a performance of gender. *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* reveals this playing out without recourse to 'gay' identities or to sexual identity at all – the surface enactment of these images of desire resists the naturalisation of the scene into narratives of gay/straight subjects or interior essences.

The abject grotesquerie also breaks with the history of 'artworthy' bodies and the perfect contained male dancer, and also with the history of The Featherstonehaughs themselves as simply fun, quirky and 'blokeish'. This piece broke with that history (which is not a history I would concede to anyway) to show



The Featherstonehaughs as engaging with the absences and melancholia, the eroticism and death encountered in the production of contemporary masculinity. The *unheimlich* effect of the choreography both blurs the distinction between reality and artifice and confronts a desiring gaze with doubles and ghosts of the abject figures expelled from 'masculinity'. Kristeva suggests that the *unheimlich* does not only frighten but also "brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less so to hunt them down, but rather to welcome them to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is ours" (Kristeva 1991: 191-2). In taking up the sedimented performatives of interiority and sexual identity, Anderson choreographs a return to history in order to style an ethical experience of fragmentation which opens up to accept the strangeness of self and Other and realise their mutual implication. The choreography welcomes the spectres of gender identification and it thereby gestures towards future articulations of masculine subjectivity which remain open to manifestations of unruly, incomplete, and deviant bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> My analysis is based on my own viewing of the piece on the 25/2/1998, a video of the piece from 26/2/1998, (both performances at The Place Theatre, London), and where I refer to Lea Anderson's comments these are drawn from an interview with myself conducted on the 4/12/2000. I will also make reference to the filmed version of the piece, *The Lost Dances of Egon Schiele* (2002).

<sup>2</sup> The ghoulish and putrescent excessiveness of Hoyle's make-up is even more pronounced in *The Lost Dances of Egon Schiele*, where instead of toning down the layers of thick colours because the camera can come closer, he applied more, to create particularly abject images of greasy, sweating, painted faces. He also re-painted the naked bodysuits so that the colour smears onto the other dancers and to the mattresses they are lying on.

<sup>3</sup> The sound score for the film version is by Steve Blake, another of Anderson's frequent collaborators. It is more sparse and eldritch and less rhythmic or figurative than Madden's music.

<sup>4</sup> See my article 'The cut –up pleasures and politics of Lea Anderson's choreography' in *Dance Theatre Journal* 18 (3) for a discussion of the use of collage and bricolage in Anderson's other work.

<sup>5</sup> Doris Humphrey's notion although, as Anderson's next piece '*Smithereens*' was to highlight, the focus of most of the early modern choreographers was also on developing a strong visual aesthetic – Humphrey herself states, "The dancer ... because his instrument is his own body, is caught in physiological compulsions, and the snare of feeling good – that is, moving without fear of imbalance – is most powerful. In children this is charming, but in adults, deplorable," (*The Art of Making Dances*, New York: Grove Press, 1959:160).



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<sup>6</sup> See Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull on Contact as a non-visual form in 'Sense, Meaning, and Perception in Three Dance Cultures' in Jane C. Desmond ed. *Meaning in Motion* London: Duke University Press 1997 pp275-278

<sup>7</sup> Although the stage piece and the film are very different in terms of structure, framing and even music, there are significant similarities in terms of the choreographic attention to vision. Therefore I will discuss them together, indicating where necessary how they differ.

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the various recent readings of Freud's 'Das Unheimliche' see Masschelein (2002) 'The concept as ghost: Conceptualization of the uncanny in late twentieth century theory', *Mosaic* 35 (1): 53-68.

<sup>9</sup> See Fredric Jameson 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' 1988:17

<sup>10</sup> Derrida argues that in the discussion of the uncanny Freud is himself haunted by ghosts of uncertainty, 1994: 172-4

<sup>11</sup> 'The Sand-Man' is the basis for the ballet 'Coppélia' – see Bergner and Plett (1996) 'Uncanny Women and Anxious Masters: Reading Coppélia Against Freud' in Morris (ed.) *Moving Words: Rewriting Dance*, London: Routledge: 159-179 for an analysis of the ballet which identifies a feminist deployment of an uncanny repetition of gender norms.



## Conclusions

A body imitating hysteria generates other hysterias and the solid geometry of representation; the theater of knowledge, is radically disturbed... It does not abandon narrative, but it refuses the closure of positivist inquiry. It does not dismantle the text as a unique source of meaning, but it destabilizes the relation between text and performance, each contaminating the other. What are the implications of a contaminated text, a realism-without-truth? (Elin Diamond 1997: 38)

If the body of this text has welcomed contamination by both performance and hysteria then, likewise, through my analysis I have actively infected various dance works with melancholia and abject homosexuality. Although this is a generation of hysteria, similar to that identified by Diamond, I am not suggesting that I have found sickness where there is none, nor have I acted as diagnostician to uncover the aetiology of a choreographic illness. Rather, through a focus on the symptomatic display of masculine identities falling ill, fragmenting and dying in relation to an ungrieved homosexuality, I have proposed that recent dance pieces offer refigurations of cultural restrictions on mourning. If a proscribed loss of homosexuality haunts hegemonic gender performance then, I have argued, this very spectrality can be engaged choreographically to exploit the inherent failures and misfires of the performative demand to 'be a man'.

Hysteria, as an excessive failure of the expressive body, is encountered in various guises in the pieces under discussion; whether presented narratively as the result of societal rejection (*Swan Lake*), as a compulsive extreme choreography of abjection (*Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird*), or as a stylisation of the surfaces of the body which radicalises and fragments spectatorship and idealisation (*The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele*). As I explore in



chapter two, Peggy Phelan has argued that hysteria is a dis-ordering of coherent subjectivity which is antithetical to the performance of a disciplined body in both dance and psychoanalysis: "dance organizes its movement across a temporal schema. And in this sense, dance, like psychoanalysis, helps join the body to time" (1996: 92). Heidi Gilpin echoes this notion that 'dance' attempts to catch a body within time and she suggests that dance criticism is the "displacement of a displacement" (1996: 108) in that an unruly body escapes both the temporal order imposed by dance and then that of writing.

Although I have questioned the notion of 'a body' radically outside of the representations and repetitions which establish it as 'a body', I nevertheless argue that the use of a notion of performative gender needs to deal with the various invisible, non-present (but not purely absent) bodies which are either abjected or disavowed in the performance of 'masculinity'. This would seem to make the task of offering a conclusion in a text about dancing hysterical bodies especially problematic in that both the resistant disruption of hysteria and the disappearances of the performing body might be halted, fixed and betrayed by the imposition of a final point. My reading of the haunting of dance and psychoanalysis suggests however that the narrative of an ordered body, its containment within a temporal schema, can be resisted precisely by acknowledging the challenges of the performative. The specter, as proposed by Jacques Derrida, appears through repetition, like the mark of writing, but is neither self-present nor absent. Borrowing from *Hamlet*, Derrida suggests that the specter "interrupts time, disarticulates it, dislodges it, displaces it out of its natural lodging: 'out of joint'" (1994: 31). In chapter one I propose a navigation of the discourses of 'performativity' and 'performance' precisely through their disruptive potential where they are both, like the ghost, a "repetition *and* first time" (1994:10); the urgency of the present moment of liveness emerges both as a repeat of the past and an opening to futural reworkings.



In chapter two I suggest that gender can be considered as the paradigmatic performative – a promise. The promise is explicitly concerned with an implied future completion and, as Shoshana Felman argues, the promise reveals “the noncoincidence of desire with the present” (1984: 49); always seductively out of reach, never self-present, the promise of gender is that identity will be achieved and secured against its others. In particular the ‘expressive’ body stages a promise which supposes a continuity both across time and across the ‘depth’ and surface of the body. The hysterical rupture of the expressive body both reveals its history and replays it unfaithfully. It is this reanimation of past bodies, in the present moment of performance, to open up to an uncertain future which is particularly useful for exploring the performative promises of identity. The hysterical body appears as the present manifestation of its past, but it does not simply ‘reveal’ the cause behind the excess of its symptoms, rather it explicitly reframes the discourses it repeats.

It is my proposal that the analysis of hysterical choreography offers something akin to a “political genealogy of gender ontologies” (Butler 1990: 33), advocated by Judith Butler, which should explore the compulsive repetitions and the penalties which police the performance of contemporary identities. Hysteria “deconstruct[s] the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts” (ibid.) through an excessive restaging of these very acts. ‘Masculinity’ appears as a product of the compulsory enactment of regulations of the body, but the excess of citation which plays out across hysteria explicitly reframes the iterative process of bodily normativity. Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that hysteria is “always self-reflexive” (1996: 45) in that the body is visibly constituted as an enactment of gender norms and “thus the hysteric emerges as a seminal figure for a discussion of how the subject is constructed through representations, even as something in this imitation and perpetuation of simulacra goes awry”(ibid.).



The iterations of the discourses of disordered bodies throughout the previous chapters therefore examine performances which in some ways are already commenting upon the conventions they re-perform. In chapter two I cite Schneider's considerations of performing hysteria (which are themselves indebted to Diamond's suggestion of a 'realism-without-truth') in which she opposed realistic hysteria to hysterical realism; the former attempts to contain somatic disruption within a linear narrative whereas the latter uses excesses of 'expression' to rupture any expressive model of the 'interiority' of identity and the legibility of bodily actions as evidence of hidden depths. Schneider suggests that female performance artists need to work with a self-reflexivity which would enable them to both cite 'feminine excess' and reveal the quotation marks;

The trick is that in so speaking her symptomatology within the explicit frame of performance (that is, explicitly showing the show), the performer would simultaneously have to escape the very signification her body speaks.  
(Schneider 1997: 116)

This 'showing of the show' is a complex doubling of performative citation that is not simply concerned with revealing the 'constructed' nature of the hysteria danced on stage. As chapter one demonstrated, Austin, Derrida and Butler have articulated in various ways that the citation on the stage is always already placed in visible quotation marks through its occupation of a theatrical context which is distinguished from 'real life'. Anderson, Bourne and de Frutos all 'show the show' of diseased, self-destructive and deathly male homosexuality but this does not insure that they escape the symptomatology of hysteria or the signification of abjection. The fact that the abject bodies are choreographed to perform at a set time on a stage and not on the bus or the street (as with Butler's drag queen example) means that in some senses the 'show' is already shown. The task or trick is not therefore to simply escape into self-reflexivity, but rather to deploy this to comment upon the very separation between 'performance' and 'performativity'



established by the context of the work, which will, in turn, trouble the preservation of a 'real' against the 'copy' (or the Austinian 'parasite' of theatricality). Derrida argues that, contrary to Austin's assertion, the context (in this case that of dance presentation) is neither fixed nor stable, nor does it remain static in determining the success of a performative. The necessary infelicity which is the condition of writing, choreographing, and indeed performing gender identity, means that a citation can "break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (Derrida 1988: 12). The effects of dance performance are not contained or isolated by theatrical contexts but can spill out of the very boundaries of the 'show'. The contagious failure of performatives in choreographic work has the potential to expose the performances of gender in non-theatrical contexts to a dis-ordering of the body. In doing so it can infect 'the everyday' with the reflexivity of hysteria, making the familiar strange to reveal the various visible and invisible quotation marks which operate to provisionally separate stage from street, the copy from the original, the artificial from the real.

If hysteria offers moments in which these citations go awry then it does so because it is a hyperbolic enactment of the failure of identification. In this sense the promise of gender ideals can be radically refigured so that they do not keep us "suspended between the depressing loop of disappointment and the aspiring arc of hope" (Phelan 1993: 173). Rather the very incompleteness of identity can be refigured as the promise of "absolute hospitality" (Derrida 1994: 168) which opens to future reconfigurations of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' which are not policed by abjection or disavowed through melancholia. Derrida suggests that a radical promise does not proscribe what will come but it resists totalization and, in its avowal of temporal instability, it can allow for unforeseen arrivals. It does not wait for completion but acknowledges the singularity of the present moment which, like the performing body and the mark of writing, is not filled with presence but is instead ruptured by the potential of its future disappearance and iteration.



It is there that differance, if it remains irreducible, irreducibly required by the spacing of any promise and by the future-to-come that comes to open it, does not mean only (as some people have too often believed and so naively) deferral, lateness, delay, postponement. In the incoercible differance the here-now unfurls. Without lateness, without delay, but without presence, it is the precipitation of an absolute singularity, singular because differing, precisely (*justement*), and always other, binding itself necessarily to the form of the instant, in *immanence and urgency*. (Derrida 1994: 31, emphasis in original)

It is precisely the promising rupture of 'masculinity' by the complex presence/absence of homosexuality and the refiguration of the promises of the performative dancing body that I have investigated through examinations of recent choreography. The discussion of works by Bourne, de Frutos and Anderson has however suggested that the replaying, restaging and reworking of the figure of the hysterical, deadly, effeminate is never simply, nor only, subversive of normative masculinity, indeed 'masculinity' is contingent upon the production and deferment of this figure, appearing only through a spectral logic of hauntings and disappearing acts. Judith Butler has suggested that intelligible gender is haunted by "spectres of discontinuity and incoherence" (1990: 17), but she argues that these very ghosts "provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder" (ibid.). In my attention to both spectres and hysterical gender disorder I have therefore attempted to suggest that even in the most pessimistic, melancholic, and violent portrayals of male homosexuality, the terms which dictate current notions of 'masculinity' are subjected to subversions which stage radical promises.



Of the examples I have considered, Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* is the most successful both critically and financially and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most conservatively theatrical. Premiered in 1995, it is the oldest piece I discuss but it is the only one continuing to tour at the time of writing (June 2003). The mild controversy which surrounded the first production has all but abated and it has been sold commercially as a successful video and widely studied as a set work on the A-level dance syllabus. Much of the discursive work undertaken by dance critics and Bourne alike since this success has been to construct *Swan Lake* as a piece which has opened up the field of contemporary dance for men (or at least for men who are sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, figured as heterosexual). Indeed the inclusion of the piece as the concluding image for the film *Billy Elliot* is supposed to suggest an optimistic ending where the kinds of prejudices Billy has encountered have been rendered redundant by the success of the piece.<sup>1</sup> Although it has unarguably had an effect on the popularity and recognition of men in dance, both in Britain and the US, I have argued that *Swan Lake* presents, at best, an ambivalent approach to homosexuality, both within the narrative of the work and the 'official' readings of the piece by critics and choreographer alike. Both choreographically and critically the piece is a complex network of anxieties concerning 'masculinity' and the incommensurability of homosexual desire.

Bourne's most recent piece was *The Car Man* (2001) which was again a replaying of other works – Bizet's *Carmen* filtered through *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Bourne again superficially courted 'controversy', and thereby commercial success, by altering the tale of seduction and betrayal in both the traditional opera and the film to include a love triangle between a mysterious masculine stranger and both the wife of the garage owner where he works and a young victimised mechanic who works alongside him. Luca, the lead character, shares many characteristics with the Stranger from Act Three of *Swan Lake* in that he is fetishised as having a brutally 'masculine presence'<sup>2</sup>, who betrays Angelo, the young, awkward and inept man who desires him. The piece shares with *Swan Lake* the tragic curtailing of the



possibility of any homosexuality as Luca is eventually shot dead by an hysterical Angelo.<sup>3</sup> In both *The Car Man* and *Swan Lake* therefore hysteria appears within a narrative of impossible desire – both the Prince and Angelo share a similar choreographic repertoire of nervous shakes and twitches performed with an unruly and violent rhythm and tension in contrast to the ‘masculine’ command and confidence displayed by the respective objects of their desire. Bourne presents a realistic hysteria, explained and eventually neutralised by the tragedies of the narratives. As my analysis of *Swan Lake* suggests however, the diegetic containment of hysteria is unsuccessful, partly because the excessive disavowals of homosexuality in the press expand the unruly bodies of the dancers into wider discourses. The pervasive fetishisation (in both Freudian and Marxist terms) of masculinity in Bourne’s work is an attempt to cure this infectious disorder and to exorcise various ghosts of effeminacy and homosexuality. If, as Laura Mulvey suggests, fetishisation is an attempt to ‘not know’ but this disavowed knowledge “hovers implacably in the wings” (Mulvey 1996: 8), then the wings of *Swan Lake* are populated by various hovering figures, threatening to take centre stage at any moment. As long as Bourne’s choreography tries to keep these ghosts at bay then the future he promises for dancing men will be a choreographic melancholia.

In chapter four I suggest that Javier de Frutos reroutes the violence of subjection in a theatricalised attack on the discourses which expel homosexuality as abject, bleeding and deadly. That this attack comes from an occupation of those very discourses means that de Frutos’s melodramatic excess seems to fall between the two types of hysteria offered by Schneider: it is neither presented as part of a realist narrative but nor does it operate with a clear reflexive distance from realism or expressive models of identity. De Frutos often appears to be caught by the signification his body speaks and the stories of abjection restaged by de Frutos are often interpreted as revealing the ‘truth’ of his homosexuality which, for critics such as Ismene Brown, is the ‘truth’ of despair, self-enforced solitude and inevitable death. I have argued that, contrary to this conservative reading, the choreography



iterates notions of authenticity in several ways in order to reveal them as performatives. 'Blood', 'sex', 'violence' and 'masculinity' are all cited as theatrical citations, that is their quotation marks are revealed, (the show is shown), but the formal structure of choreographic repetition also emphasises a complex attachment to abjection through a compulsive subjection to painful discourses. De Frutos's work therefore does not offer a simple, or necessarily subversive, performance of hysteria; rather the choreographic iteration of subjection and abjection reveals the impossibility of taking up a position outside of the discourses which have constituted him as abject. Although this would seem to suggest a futile struggle against hegemonic norms, I argue that the works offer a site for mourning using what Butler has termed "theatrical rage" (1993: 233) to overperform the pain of being cast as always already dead. In doing so, de Frutos's pieces use the force of foreclosed desire to rage against the proscribed disavowal of lost desire in 'masculine' identity.

Subsequent to *Grass* and *The Hypochondriac Bird*, de Frutos's work has mainly been centred around research on Tennessee Williams (he was awarded an Arts Council Research Fellowship to conduct this research). Williams is of course a master of melancholic melodrama, and the image of homosexuality as a fatal illness appears in many of his plays and stories (for example the ghost of dead Skipper's desire haunts Brick in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* and in *Suddenly Last Summer* a character is literally torn apart for his deviant desires)<sup>4</sup>. In de Frutos's most recent work, *Montana's Winter* (2000), he began with a minimalistic neurotic solo of shudders and shakes called *Affliction of Loneliness* followed by a dark group piece entitled *Mazatlan* which expanded his work on violent relationships and loss.<sup>5</sup> Again hysterical excess and the spectres of abjection were invoked but the participation of five other dancers, and the explicit references to Williams, meant that De Frutos further resisted the reading of auto-biographical narratives within his melodramatic theatricality. Through characteristic fragmentary and



repetitive choreography he has continued to explore the difficult possibilities of subversion in the compulsory attachment to violent norms of bodily coherence.

*The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* was considered by critics as something of a break in Lea Anderson's style but her subsequent work, *Smithereens* (2000) and 3 (2001), have continued with the *unheimlich* explorations of fragmentation, perversity and disruption established in this piece. All three recent pieces have dealt explicitly with their sources, offering stylistic rereadings of the visual imagery of Weimar cabaret and Ausdrucktanz (*Smithereens*) and outsider art including that of Henri Darger and Pierre Molinier (3). In chapter five I argued that Anderson uses the imagery of Egon Schiele to counter discourses of the expressive body which have run through art history and dance criticism. Rather than reject wholesale the notion of expressivity, *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* presents surface stylisations of the body which do not reveal an internal core of gender identity or sexuality but instead they explicitly outline the productivity of choreographed bodies in the very 'interiority' they are analysed to reveal. Anderson's piece, via Schiele, draws on the iconography of hysteria patients at the Salpêtrière, and like Schiele she is primarily interested in the aesthetics of fragmentation. Unlike Bourne, Anderson does not offer a narrative of illness and unlike de Frutos she does not explore the compulsive attachment to abjection; the deployment of hysteria by *The Featherstonehaughs* centres on the fracturing of the intelligibility of the body and the resulting frustration of a 'reading' of their movements.

Appearing at once expressive and yet disturbingly blank, the dancers perform uncanny erotic acts and explicitly address the voyeuristic desires of the audience – in effect we become the artist to sketch out our subjectivity through the bodies on stage. In this they resemble the patients of Charcot and Freud and the models of Schiele, who arguably reflect back the desires of their observers more than they reveal their inner depths. The 'homosexual' duets do not yearn after impossible



idealised love but feature the performative iterations of desire staged between two abject bodies. Idealisation is radically redrawn in *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* to feature the reanimated zombie-like bodies which are buried in conventional 'masculine' identification. Anderson's revisitation of other bodies, in this piece and in her subsequent work, therefore engages with the spectrality of identification, the proscribed losses which rise to visit gender norms in spite of the repeated announcements of their death, which are only after all "the performative of an act of war or the impotent gesticulation, the restless dream, of an execution" (Derrida 1994: 48). Rather than attempt to exorcise the melancholia and abjection at the heart of contemporary masculine norms, *The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketch Books of Egon Schiele* choreographs their return in an *unheimlich* play across surface significations and thereby stylises a masculinity which does not issue death sentences but performs a radical promise to refigure the violent abjection of homosexuality.

In order to remain open to the various promises of recent dance work, my intention has not therefore been to fix the dancing bodies which I saw on stage several years ago, or have repeatedly watched on video, into a single narrative of inevitable gender melancholia. Nor do I suggest that what I have termed 'hegemonic' or 'normative' masculinity has remained unaltered through the processes of dancing, watching, writing and reading. It is precisely the temporal instability which performativity attends to that has been the focus of this thesis. Indeed even though in chapter three I suggest that AMP's *Swan Lake* attempts to close down homosexual desire through a narrative of fetishisation and idealisation, the piece itself proves particularly difficult to close down to one reading because it continues to be performed. Which *Swan Lake* am I writing about? The live performances I have attended? The video? And am I writing about the performances of de Frutos and Watton and *The Featherstonehaughs* or only the traces caught in my memory and captured on tape? Andre Lepecki suggests that when we write about dance we performatively set it again in motion to watch "a



spectre of what we think it was probably there on the stage once; just now, last night, a year ago" (1996: 72). Julian Wolfreys has argued, *pace* Derrida, that scholarship is always haunted because writing always involves the citation of others, so much so that any academic text "disrupts the authority of identity and of origin, being always already in motion" (2002: 27). The moment of writing is, like that of dance, structured through internal spacings so that the full presence of 'I' as the author is not communicated but rather a performative choreographic animation of specters marks the page.

The bodies which appear and disappear throughout this text are therefore not properly those of the performers but neither do they belong to me. Indeed if, as Derrida suggests, "everyone reads, acts, writes with his or her ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other" (Derrida 1994: 139), then this analysis of choreography is a ghostdance which invokes both my traces of dancing bodies together with other phantasmagoria which are the movements of multifarious past, present and future bodies which include mine, yours, and the abject no-bodies of normative gender. In my attempt at a communication with the dead who litter the stages of 'masculine' performance I therefore hope to engage with, and make temporarily manifest without exorcising, these disavowed ghosts of identification in order to refigure the very materiality of 'masculinity'. The correlative textual replaying of twitching, shuddering, collapsing, and fragmenting hysterical bodies risks being contaminated by the very melancholia which it sets out to deconstruct; but it is precisely through impure and infectious citations that both choreography and writing can revisit histories of loss. In doing so they potentially open up cultural spaces in which to properly mourn these proscribed deaths and thereby shift performative 'masculinity' from a demand of loss to a promise of welcome.

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Daldry, the director of *Billy Elliot*, gives this reason in the TV documentary *Bourne to Dance*



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<sup>2</sup>Matthew Bourne suggests in *Bourne to Dance* that he chose to cast the butch Alan Vincent in the lead role because he was physically unlike a “stereotypical effeminate male dancer”. This mirrors Bourne’s repeated assertion of Adam Cooper’s alluring ‘masculinity’, discussed in chapter two.

<sup>3</sup> See Ian Bramley’s critique of the machismo and fetishised male homoerotics of *The Car Man* in ‘High Art? No Thank You’ in *Dance Theatre Journal*, vol. 16, no.4 2001 p47.

<sup>4</sup> See David Savran *Communists, Cowboys and Queers* (1992) for a compelling reading of the queer politics of Tennessee Williams’ work. Savran identifies many features of William’s texts, such as fragmented subjects, excessive expression and the erotics of violence that I have suggested are features of de Frutos’s choreography.

<sup>5</sup> See my review of *Mazatlan* in *Dance Theatre Journal*, vol. 16, no.2, 2000 p6-7, where I also discuss Lea Anderson’s *Smithereens*.



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